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# **BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY**

## **Grassroots Women Arise**

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BY

**The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian  
Theologians**



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Attakwu, Enugu.

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All Correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, B.E.Th. Spiritan International School of Theology (SIST), P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria.



# BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY 8: 1, 1996

## Grassroot Women Arise

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial	1
S. A. Akpala    Human Rights Education, Customary Laws and the Position of Women in the Contemporary Nigerian Society	4
M. A. Olagoke            Rural Poverty and Women's Response to Economic Policies in Africa	15
Protus Kemdirim & Nubia Kai            The Role of Muslim Women in Moorish Empire Implications for Women in Islam Today	23
Olajubi Oyeronke            Christ, Women and Culture: Model for the Nigerian Society	33
Chinedu A. Amadi-Azuogu    The Place of Women in The NT House Codes	39
 <i>BOOK REVIEW</i>	
Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, c.s.sp <i>Richard A. McCormick and the Renewal of Moral Theology.</i>	
Reviewer, Breifne Walker, c.s.sp.	60

## **CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE**

- 1. AKPALA, Barrister (Mrs) S.A., is Principal Assistant Registrar, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus. She is also President, Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners**
- 2. OLAGOKE, M.A. is the Executive Director, Nigerian Integrated Rural Accelerated Development Organisation (NIRADO), Marina, Lagos.**
- 3. KEMDIRIM, Protus and NUBIA, Kai, are lecturers at the Department of Religion, University of Port Harcourt.**
- 4. OYERONKE, Olajubi, lectures at the Department of Religion, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State.**
- 5. AMADI-AZUOGU, Chinedu A., lectures in Scripture at the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu.**

## Editorial

### « Grassroots Women Arise »

The phrase "Grassroots Women Arise" is the theme of a six day international workshop held at the Development Education Centre (DEC) Enugu, Nigeria, 25th April to 1st May 1996. In that workshop issue papers were presented on the marginalization of women and the channels for women empowerment through self-help development projects. Two of those papers are incorporated into this issue of our *Bulletin* Barrister S.A. Akpala who is the founder and president of the Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners addressed the issue of the denial of human rights to women in the continued practice of certain customary laws in the contemporary Nigerian society. Widowhood and the law of inheritance as practised among the Igbo are examples of such obnoxious customs. Radical reforms are called for to change such laws. The Yoruba are giving leadership in this regard. Olagoke took a critical look at women response to economic reform policies in Africa and the continuing poverty which bedevils the rural areas of the continent. His argument is that while the programmes of economic reform may be good, they are vitiated by poor policy-implementation. In many cases women have responded creatively to rural poverty despite the poor policy implementation of laudable economic reform programmes. He pointed out DEC as an example of such a creative response to rural poverty.

In addition to issue papers from the conference on Grassroots Women Arise, we solicited articles on the impact of the two dominant religions, Islam and Christianity, on the rights of women in society. Protus Kemdirim and Nubia Kai noted the astonishing degree of freedom and creativity enjoyed by African Muslim women during the period of the Moorish (Islamic) empire. This contrasts sharply with the subjugation of women in the present day practice of Islam. In his exegetical analysis of some New Testament "House-Codes", Amadi-Azuogu argues that Paul was

not responsible for the anti-feminism that one finds in the Pastoral Letters like First and Second Timothy. These letters do not come from Paul but from one who wanted to claim Pauline authority for the maintenance of order in the family. And in another paper, Olagunji points out how Jesus in his life and ministry did not conform to laid down Jewish social practices. Such non-conformist attitude is verified in Jesus' relationship to women. Olagunji draws interesting implications of the Jesus way for the contemporary Nigerian society.

The purpose of this issue of our *Bulletin* is to project the vision of the Development Education Centre (DEC) which is principally geared towards enabling women suffering from poverty and marginalization to work towards achieving self-reliance. The majority of African women are still struggling to be recognised as persons with equal rights and opportunities as their male counterparts. The focus of DEC, as a Non-Governmental Organisation, is the rural poor. DEC has the ambitious programme of designing an institutional frame-work to bring the rural poor and the marginalized women within a viable development network. This fact is brought out clearly by Cecilia Asogwa, director of DEC, in her opening address during the Conference on "Grassroots, Women Arise». She declared "if financial resources can be made available to women suffering poverty, at terms and conditions which are appropriate and reasonable, these millions of small people with their millions of small pursuits can add up to create the biggest development wonder".

The "development wonder" is the dream of DEC. The emphasis of DEC after over ten years of learning experience is self-help for the rural poor and functional education. To benefit from DEC schemes, rural women of any particular village following the programme must form themselves into a group of not more than forty and not less than twenty persons. Participation and commitment of each person and each group in DEC's programmes are imperative. Consequently, in order to strengthen the structures of this movement, DEC insists that credit would only be supplied to members of groups which had met regularly for at least one

year, had demonstrated a capacity to save, and had engaged in some form of collective activity. "A further requirement, according to Asogwa, "was that no individuals would be eligible for loans who had not first completed a functional education course - hence our strategy of training and sponsoring functional literacy workers and village health workers in all villages where DEC is working with women in their self-help groups".

DEC is currently working in two hundred villages in the five Igbo-speaking states East of the Niger - Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. There are three hundred functional women self-help groups with more than twelve thousand women participating. This experience in women empowerment and liberation at the grassroots level is exhilarating. Freedom is never given on a platter of gold; consequently, DEC provides the opportunity for women to be fully involved in a carefully designed programme of action in order to achieve liberation. In addition, since DEC has made an option for the rural poor, the mobilisation of these rural women (who normally survive through farm work) to overcome poverty and distress is rooted in programmes which lay the foundations for institutional reform. Only when these women receive functional education may they realistically embark on small-scale business, and be aware that their rights are infringed upon. DEC is an example of how the rural poor through participation help to devise concrete strategies of achieving self-reliance. This programme which has been implemented in communities East of the Niger should be extended to other parts of Nigeria.

## Human Rights Education, Customary Laws and the Position of Women in the Contemporary Nigerian Society

By

S. A. Akpala

### *Introduction*

The issue of human rights came into great focus at the end of the second world war in 1945. At that time, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) emerged for the purposes of promoting peace and security in the world so as to guard against future perpetration of atrocities on individuals, groups and nations as was evidenced during the two world wars.

The charter which established the UNO in 1945 is replete with human rights provisions. In the preamble to the Charter, the UNO, "reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human person, in the equality of the rights of men and women....". In 1948, the UNO took another major step in the area of protection and promotion of human rights by adopting in its General Assembly the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which enumerated in fuller form the human rights already mentioned in the 1945 UN Charter.

The above is not to say that human rights are issues of the post world war period. The *Magna Carta* of 1215 embodies the greatest principles of human rights for the protection of the citizens of England who had before then struggled to have their rights respected and recognised against the arbitrary rule of kings and the ruling class. Thus Chapter 39 of the *Magna Carta* states that, "No free man shall be taken, outlawed, banished or in any way destroyed, nor will we proceed against or prosecute him except by the lawful judgement of the peers and by the law of the land." The *American Declaration of Independence* of 1776 vividly portrayed the wishes of the American people to the protection of their fundamental human rights. The

preamble to the Declaration states that, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Similarly the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man* embodies a list of the fundamental rights for the protection of the people against the injustices and cruelties of the government and individuals. On the African scene, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1981 adopted the *African Charter on Human and People's Rights* for similar purposes.

### *Fundamental Rights of Women*

As people continued to struggle for the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights, it became quite obvious that women were being more and more oppressed and marginalised. This situation again engaged the attention of the United Nations which intervened to see that these rights which are bestowed by God on everyone are enjoyed by both men and women.

The UN intervention and efforts culminated in the adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1979 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW).

The Convention came into force in September 1981. This convention has so far been described as the key international human rights instrument on combating the legal, social and other forms of discrimination and subordination of women.<sup>1</sup>

Today the countries of the world which form the United Nations, including Nigeria are giving recognition to human rights by the incorporation of human rights principles into their respective constitutions. Chapter (IV) of the Nigerian Constitution, 1979 contains a list of such fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens. These include the right to life; to dignity of human person; to fair hearing; to private and family life; to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; to peaceful assembly and association; to freedom from discrimination and to own and dispose of property.



### *What are Human Rights*

The World Conference on Human Rights which was held in Vienna in 1993 came up with a definition of human rights as those "rights which every human being is entitled to enjoy and to have protected."<sup>2</sup> Again human rights were defined as "natural and imprescriptible rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness."<sup>3</sup>

Lastly they have been defined as "such rights which attach to one by the mere fact of one being born as a human being." They are said to be anterior to all laws and are automatic. They are inalienable, universal, immutable and unchangeable.<sup>4</sup> The above definitions clearly show that human rights are the rights of everyone which must be enjoyed equally by both men and women as creatures of God who bestowed these rights on them. Another key point from the definitions is that no one, *not even the government has the right to deprive anyone of these rights.* The individual stands to have his/her fundamental rights protected by the state's machinery properly put in place for that purpose.

Although the above definitions were silent on the exceptions for infringing the human rights of the citizens, it is pertinent to mention that most modern constitutions always provide exceptions where individuals can be deprived of their basic human rights. These are situations where the law has prescribed a penalty for certain offences like murder in which the offender can be deprived of his/her life; or stealing in which the offender can be denied his/her liberty by imprisonment etc.: Therefore, in the absence of commission of crimes, men and women must remain free and may equally enjoy their fundamental human rights.

### *Customary Laws Affecting Women's Basic Rights*

Customary law refers to the native law and customs of the people. The Nigerian society is heterogeneous in that it has varied traditions and customs as it has various tribes and ethnic groups. Our discourse on the customary law affecting women's basic rights will centre on the two broad areas of customary law marriage, and customary law of

inheritance. This is because some of the worst violations of women's basic human rights have occurred and have been occurring under these two areas.

### *Customary Marriage*

Customary marriage comprises of marriages under the customary law and Islamic law. Unlike a statutory marriage which is monogamous the man under customary marriage may marry another wife or other wives while the first marriage lasts. Another customary marriage recognised under the customary law, especially in the Southern part of Nigerian is what Meek<sup>5</sup> described as woman-to-woman marriage in which a childless wife tries to fulfil her supreme role of motherhood by paying for a new wife for her husband who should bear children on her behalf for her husband.

Customary or Islamic marriage is in many ways disadvantageous to women towards the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights. The *Consent* of a girl to a marriage under the two respective customary laws is usually not considered important. This is why there are so many child-marriages today in Nigeria by which parents give out their daughters of tender ages of 15 years or below to men of their grandfathers' age. By so doing, the fundamental rights of the girls to human dignity are grossly violated. Alongside the issue of lack of consent is the custom of *Bride Price* which is recognised under the customary law marriage as a necessary step towards the solemnisation of customary law marriage. Placing a price on a wife as if she were an ordinary object of property is derogatory of woman as a human being and therefore infringes on her basic rights of liberty.

An extension of this feature of customary marriage is the issue of widowhood rites and inheritance as they obtain among the Igbo. On the death of a husband, his wife is considered as part of his property and can be inherited by the deceased husband's brother or son alongside his property. This is known as *widowhood inheritance*. Again because the woman is seen as having been paid for as any other item of property, her status in the family is very low and she enjoys little or no respect. The blood chilling treatment of widows

(*widowhood rites*) are common among southern Nigerian families. So many widows were known to have been forced to sleep on bare floors for a definite number of days following the death of their husbands. Their hair was forcefully scraped with broken bottles by the daughters of the extended family (*Umuada*). They were forced to drink the water used in washing the corpse of the dead husbands. They were isolated in huts and made to visit far-away streams at midnight to weep and sing the praises of the dead husbands. These atrocities deriving from customary marriages violate the widow's right to life, human dignity and freedom. Since men are not made to undergo these obnoxious rites, these treatments are also discriminatory and contrary to the principle of equality of rights for all citizens irrespective of sex.<sup>6</sup> They are dehumanising and tend to reduce women to the level of animals.

*Violence against women* in the family is often associated with the issue of bride price. A man who has paid money to marry his wife may demand absolute obedience to whatever he orders the wife to do. The failure to comply may earn the wife merciless beating from the husband as lessons on how to be a good wife. The belief that girls can easily be disposed of to another family while boys should be equipped to be successful to perpetuate the family lineage has contributed to denying girls equal access to education and vocational training with boys.

We cannot talk about customary marriage without discussing divorce under customary law. *Divorce under customary law* takes various forms depending on the customs of the parties to the marriage. The general pattern is for the husband to order the wife out of the matrimonial home and inform the in-laws of his intention to end the marriage. A customary marriage may be dissolved by a customary court on application by either party to the marriage. A wife may also decide to leave the husband and return to her people. In each case the bride price is returned to the husband who has the right of custody of the children on the dissolution of the marriage. The exception is where the children are too young to be separated from the mother.

Divorce under Islamic marriage is said to be less cumbersome because it can be done by a husband simply by pronouncing *talac* (divorce) three times after which the marriage is irrevocably dissolved. The husband reserves the right to unilaterally divorce his wife any time without giving any reason. On dissolution of the marriage, the mother is entitled to the custody of the children until the age of seven.<sup>7</sup>

### *Customary Law of Inheritance*

Inheritance rights under customary law are highly discriminatory to women in Nigeria. These rights differ from one locality to another.

In Igbo society, for example, a woman is not entitled to any allocation of family land, neither is she allowed to farm on it or live on it for a period of her life. Inheritance of immovable property such as land or house is by the sons of the family. Where the head of the family is not survived by sons, the daughters have no right to inherit his compound or any of his lands or houses. Such property is inherited by the brother or uncle of the deceased. This is also said to be the situation among some States in the northern part of the country which practice patrilineal system of inheritance by which interest in land passes through the father's line. It is said that even where a woman has purchased land or house with her money, she has no right to dispose of the land without the consent of her husband. On her death, such property is inherited by her husband.<sup>8</sup>

Inheritance under Islamic law is said to be based on the principle that the property of the deceased should be used primarily for the support of persons who were entitled to be supported by the deceased in his lifetime, and who would greatly suffer at his death. Even the widows and the daughters are guaranteed shares in the property of their deceased husband/fathers. The discriminatory aspects of Islamic law of inheritance occur where the widow inherits one quarter of the estate of her deceased husband whereas the widower takes half of the net estate of a deceased wife. In like manner, a daughter acquires half of what a son gets of their deceased father's property.<sup>9</sup>

It is gratifying that women's rights have been recognised and accepted in the Western part of this country. Under the developed Yoruba customary law of inheritance, both male and female children inherit their parents real property equally. This situation received judicial acceptance in the celebrated case of *Dawodu and Others V Danmole and Others* (1962) IWLR p.10, where the court held that in cases where the parties are Yoruba, the eldest son is not entitled to a greater share of a deceased father's property than the other children and that all the children are entitled equally irrespective of sex. The position of women under the Yoruba customary law of inheritance gives hope to Nigerian females that their continued efforts may one day bring the much needed equality of rights between men and women not only in the area of property inheritance but in other aspects of fundamental human rights like equal rights in employment, etc.

### *Level of Human Rights Education Among Women*

We will like to preface this part of the paper with what Eleanor Roosevelt of United States of America asked of human rights education/awareness. She asked,

"Where, after all do universal human rights begin? In small places close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world.... such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

Some appreciable efforts have been made to educate Nigerian women of their fundamental human rights. The first was the United Nations declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year, which was devoted to the promotion of equality of rights between men and women. Then followed the United Nations Decade for Women, 1976-1985. Nigeria was very active in the programmes of the International Year and the Decade by organising

Seminars/Workshops around the set objectives of equality, development and peace. The 1985 World Conference in Nairobi, Kenya was to mark the end of the Decade and to assess the progress made so far. The Conference adopted a document known as the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies* (NFLS) by which the goals of the Decade for women would be actualised by member nations to the conference. Nigeria was also fully involved in NFLS.

The question then arises as to what Nigerian women have done at the local levels to transmit the ideas and information gained at the international forum for the benefit of Nigerian women. Women organisations have sprung up in Nigeria following the outcome of the public awareness created around the international conferences. The aims and objectives of these local organisations are similar i.e. to work for the enhancement of the position of women in the society.

While a few of these organisations have made inroads into the rural areas where the majority of the poor women who are the victims of the obnoxious customary law practices live, others have concentrated their activities in the urban areas among the elitist women groups who are less concerned with the needs of their less privileged counterparts. The *Development Education Centre* (DEC) Enugu; the *Legal Research and Resources Centre*, Lagos; *Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners* (SWEWP), Enugu; *Medical Women Association* and *Federation of Female Lawyers* (branches); have been doing their best to reach out to the rural women by organising human rights seminars/workshops around such women. The efforts are still not adequate looking at the spread and size of Nigeria. This is why the majority of Nigerian women still live in ignorance of their basic human rights. To this end, human rights education among Nigerian women is still very low and must be stepped up. It is only when women know of their basic rights that they can begin to assert such rights, thereby improving their position in the society.

### *The Position of Women in the Contemporary Nigerian Society*

One of the common expressions we hear today is that "Nigerian women have come of age." One wonders how true this statement is.

In order to admit the truth or otherwise of the statement, let us briefly state what the position of Nigerian Women had been in the past and what it is today.

Nigerian women in the past were confined to the home and their duties centred around the kitchen. They lacked education and therefore could not engage in paid employment. They were therefore socially and economically powerless. Traditions and customs weighed down on them to the extent that it was regarded as taboo for women to be seen outside the home during certain hours. Hence they were denied jobs which required night work. Women were seen as created only to serve and never to be served. They were not part of decision making and could not challenge policies, even where such policies were adverse to their being.

Today, the position of women in Nigeria has appreciably improved. Many Nigerian families now send their daughters to school. There are female professionals in such areas as Medicine, Law, Engineering, Accountancy, Architecture, to name but a few. There are women ministers, ambassadors, professors, company executives etc. This positive change on the position of women did not come on a platter of gold. Nigerian women human rights activists and social reformers have for many years struggled to drum it into the Bars of the government that women's equal rights with men must be recognised and respected.

The appreciable level of women education has also reduced the extent of practices of oppressive traditional customs which in the past impeded women development. Awareness is being created through public rallies of women's equal right to participate in politics. This has also resulted to the enhanced position of Nigerian women.

However, the picture painted above of the position of the present day Nigerian women relate to only an insignificant number. The majority of Nigerian women, especially those who live in the rural areas are very much ignorant of their fundamental human rights. Women should therefore not relent in their efforts to further improve the lot of their fellow women.



## *Conclusion and Recommendation*

We have traced the evolution of fundamental human rights, defined the meaning of such rights and then linked them to the practice of customary laws as these relate Nigerian women. This is purposely done in order to help women involved in human rights advocacy to have clear understanding of the subject.

Human rights education is the first step towards wiping out prejudices against women. Such education programme must not be targeted at women only but also at the community in general so that men who make and uphold oppressive customs and traditions may be addressed to reverse such customs and traditions which impede development of women and the girl-child. Human Rights advocacy and dissemination of information on the provisions of CEDAW and NFLS can go a long way in actualising the principles of equality of rights between men and women.

On the issue of bride price, we recommend total abolition of bride price. The argument by some women that non-payment of bride price would reduce their husbands respect for them is fallacious. The adverse effects of bride price on women far outweigh whatever advantages it may have. On the issue of inheritance, we recommend a system whereby daughters and sons have equal shares in the property of their deceased parents; and the widows, including childless ones, have shares in their deceased husbands' property.

Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have major roles to play in human rights education. We have already mentioned the NGOs which are directly involved in human rights education. It is the place of these organisations to challenge all women to the problem. NGOs should arouse the interest of women, farmers, traders and even ordinary housewives to work as human rights advocates in their Church, town/village meetings, etc. Most importantly, it is the function of NGOs to bring pressure on the government to legislate against the customs and traditions that grossly violate women's enjoyment of their fundamental human rights.

This will enable the victims of human rights violation to seek legal redress in a court of law. Government establishment of Ministry of

Women Affairs is commendable but it is the women themselves who will work hard for the attainment of women development through the Ministry. Lastly, NGOs should have the courage to openly challenge the violation of human rights, and even bring action to enforce such rights for and on behalf of poor women whose fundamental human rights have been violated or about to be trampled upon.

<sup>1</sup> Shadrack B. O. Gutto, *Human and Peoples Rights for the Oppressed*, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1993, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Reoch, (ed), *Human Rights - the New Consensus*, London: Regency Press, Ltd, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> G. Ezejiolor, *Human Rights Protection under the Law*, London: Butterworths, 1964, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Joy Ezeilo, « The Situation of Rights of Women in Nigeria », a Paper presented at a Workshop organised by Legal Research and Resources Centre, Lagos (June 1996), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 275.

<sup>6</sup> Section 39 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

<sup>7</sup> Ayesha Imam (ed), *Women in Nigeria* (WIN) Document, Zaria, 1985, pp. 83-88.

<sup>8</sup> Tokumbo Ige, ed, *Women and Inheritance Law in Nigeria*, Lagos, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 10, 11.

## Rural Poverty and Women's Response to Economic Policies in Africa

By

M. A. Olagoke

### *Introduction*

The link between rural poverty and economic policies in Africa appears obvious. This is in view of the fact that, the performance of the informal (rural) economies, is to a large extent influenced, directly or otherwise by the macro-economic policy environment. Policies on farm produce and energy (fuel) prices, as well as the currency exchange rates provide quick examples of how economic policies can affect rural poverty, especially among women. The vicious cycle of poverty is a well-known concept which appears relevant in this regard.

While it may be true that the African policy environment is not at its best, there is evidence to show that, not all the economic policies are inhibitory to the participation of women in the process of rural poverty alleviation. In this connection, it may be relevant to state here, as has been done by most writers, that the problem with most economic policies in Africa, has been that of poor implementation; occasioned by a continual interaction of various socio-political and other factors. This reality illuminates the complexity of the task involved in dealing with rural poverty from the economic policy angle.

A concise review of women's efforts to contain and reduce rural poverty on the African continent, within a largely poor-policy-implementation environment is the focus of this paper.

The discussion will begin with a contextual definition of poverty, followed by an examination of some relevant economic policies. It will conclude with a brief presentation of women's response to these policies in their (women's) effort to alleviate the rural poverty level within the African continent.

*What is Rural Poverty*

Against the background of *poverty* being generally considered in relative terms, this paper will limit itself, first, to that definition which describes poverty as the inability of individuals or groups of people to provide for themselves and their immediate dependants such basic necessities as food, clothing and shelter within their own geographical and/or social environments.

Further, the (rural) poor will include those who are compelled to consume but are unable to "replace" their natural resources in an effort to provide the highlighted basic needs. Broadly speaking and for the purpose of this discussion, such natural resources will include soil, water and forest resources.

*Some Economic Policies in Africa*

According to a report to the Development Fund for Africa (USAID 1993):

The economic crisis of the formal economy (in Africa) forced governments to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and donors for special financial assistance. That assistance which came tied to policy conditions was packaged in Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). As a result, the rapid decline of the formal economy was arrested and reversed.

(Similarly), the impact of the economic reform on the informal economy was substantial... particularly in rural infrastructure... while the balance of payments support meant that items such as soap, clothes, tools and matches could be bought rather cheaply.

*(However).... the economic and political changes that have occurred in Africa are fragile. Many serious (macro) economic problems remain."*

Most African countries are still grappling with the serious economic problems that have resulted from policies emanating from the

adoption of SAP; although, as is already clearly stated in the quoted reference, SAP was not a completely "no-gain" intervention. It recorded some successes especially at the initial stages of implementation in some African countries.

The cases of Solomon Bukededeo, a farmer in Central Uganda and Roster Chindindindi, another farmer in Zambia, according to a recent report (*African Farmer*, 1995), present some clear illustrations of the foregoing USAID report. Both farmers were encouraged to obtain loans on relatively easy term for agricultural production. But by the time Chindindindi's crop was ready for sale, an economic reform programme had made it cheaper to import from South Africa than to buy from local sources, thereby leaving him with severe marketing problems.

In the case of Bukedeko, the phenomenal increase in the interest rate charged by the State-owned bank from 25 percent a year when he borrowed to 50 percent five years later made it impossible for him to pay back the loan. There are many rural dwellers in Africa whose experiences are similar to Chindindindi's and Bukedeko's.

Another 'SAP-induced' economic policy that appears to have heightened rural poverty level in Africa was the progressive devaluation of the local currency. In global economic terms, this intervention appeared justifiable; as most of the currencies were overvalued. However, the lack of appropriate control mechanisms dealt devastating blows to most rural economies.

In many African countries, 'unfocused' currency devaluation resulted in sharp increases in the cost of such important items as kerosene, matches, gasoline, diesel, fertiliser and local transport; which in turn resulted in adverse effects on the rural economies.

The impact of economic policies on women activities in most rural communities in Africa goes beyond the experiences of the two men cited in the earlier part of this paper.

For example, according to Mehra (1994):

National development and donor-assisted agricultural and rural development programs, instead of helping to alleviate rural women's farming constraints and enabling them to improve their

productivity as part of an overall strategy to raise farm output, have historically bypassed them. Because governments and donor agencies assumed that women were household, rather than economic producers; they either ignored women's roles entirely or provided them with information and training suitable only for their household production roles and not their equally important economic roles.

While the foregoing assertion may not be entirely true in some African countries, the following example provided by the same author, appears to illustrate what happens in some cases:

In the more recent literature, Saito and Weidemann (1990), reported on a village livestock project in Burkina Faso that failed because information and resources on small animals were directed at men, even though women were primarily responsible for small livestock production.

The issue of Land Rights in most African countries is another policy area that deserves some mention, in view of its strong economic policy implication. Merha (1994) quoting Panayotou (1993) stated that:

Lack of proper access to and control over land affects farm productivity in a number of ways. First, as banks often require land as collateral for credit, lack of title to land constrains women's access to loans.

It must be stated at this juncture, that *not* all economic policies in Africa are discriminatory or unfavourable to the effective participation of women in the process of poverty alleviation.

The decision by the Federal Government of Nigeria to create a ministry to address women affairs specifically, (although may not be a strictly economic policy) appears to be a good starting point in the process of women empowerment from the policy dimension.

In addition, a report in the *African Farmer* (1995), states that Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has "gradually and systematically" removed a number of road blocks that prevented (rural) women from participating effectively in the process of national and rural development.

### *Women Response to Economic Policies in Africa*

The response of women to economic policies in Africa will be considered from two perspectives - the role of relevant NGOs on one hand and the role of the rural women themselves on the other.

In this connection, women response will be discussed under the following headings: Co-operative Movements; Rural Credit Programmes; Income Generation; Sustainable Agriculture; Advocacy role; Women Health

#### *Co-operative Movements*

The activities of the host organisation - DEC - in the process of economic empowerment of rural women in Nigeria through co-operative activities deserves some special focus.

According to Asogwa (1990)

(Through some facilitation support from DEC), rural women in (Eastern) Nigeria are organising themselves into grassroots level self help project groups to enable them learn from one another and help one another to get economic power through their production.

The above assertion by Asogwa has been confirmed by many national and international rural development workers who have visited several of DEC projects in Eastern Nigeria.

On a different but relevant note, Iyoha (1991) reported that "In Niger state (of Nigeria), the women co-operatives are so materially strong that men go to them for loans."



Success stories like the above two are now spreading all over the continent through the efforts of organisations like DEC, Enugu, Nigeria.

### *Rural Credit Programmes*

The Nigerian Community Development Trust Fund COWAN, Nigeria, Development Exchange Centre (DEC) Bauchi, Nigeria, the Institute of Cultural Affairs, MENA, Cairo provide good examples of organisations, that have embarked on economic empowerment activities through their rural credit programmes with women groups.

The collaboration, often in the form of revolving loan schemes, have enabled numerous women groups achieve varying degrees of economic self-reliance.

### *Income Generation Activities*

The Nigerian Integrated Rural Accelerated Development Organisation (NIRADO), Lagos, TechnoServe, IRED West Africa, Lagos, the Food Basket Foundation International (FBFI), Nigeria, the North-South Consultants Exchange in Cairo as well as the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Côte d'Ivoire, are just a few examples of NGOs that have focused on income generation among rural groups as a component of their programme delivery strategy. Some of these NGOs focus specifically on women groups. And quite happily, the women are taking up the challenge seriously; with reports of some remarkable achievements by some of the women groups.

### *Sustainable Agriculture*

Fertilisers, apart from being detrimental to soil productivity on the long run, have become too expensive in many African countries for the rural people to afford. 'SAVE', a sustainable agricultural production programme, is the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Zambia's (ICAZ) response to economic policies bordering on fertiliser use.

'SAVE', in certain cases is focused specifically on women groups in several villages of Zambia.

The 'Jubraka' in the En Nahud Province of Sudan, is the local women's strategy to deal with the problems arising from limited resources for farming in the rural areas. Under a 'Jubraka', the group of rural women organise themselves into a form of co-operative that combines market gardening with small ruminant production on small parcels of land. In some cases a 'Jubraka' also engages in such other small scale economic activities as handicraft.

### *Advocacy Role*

Women in Nigeria (WIN) is one of the many women advocacy groups in Africa. Through the activities of these groups, a lot of fundamental human right issues are addressed to enable women participate more effectively in the process of rural poverty alleviation.

### *Women Health*

Central to the issue of poverty alleviation is good health. The Association for Reproductive and Family Health (ARGH) Nigeria, and the Women's Health Organisation of Nigeria (WHON) are examples of many organisations across Africa that have focused mainly on women health. Other organisations such as the Community Life Project (CLP) Lagos, Nigeria, focus more on such specific areas like AIDS and related health issues.

The various training programmes of these NGOs have improved the health status of rural women thereby enabling them (the rural women) to contribute more positively to the process of rural poverty alleviation.

### *Conclusion*

The role of women in rural poverty alleviation is too important to be ignored. This is in view of the fact that women, besides their household production roles, are engaged in major economic

production activities in their own right; sometimes with greater relative involvement than the men.

The present economic policy environment in Africa provides some conducive atmosphere for women to play their identified roles. However, available evidence indicates that there is much room for improvement.

On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence that women have utilised the available opportunities; although more active participation by more women appears necessary in this important component of integrated rural development.

Based on the foregoing, it will appear imperative for African governments to improve the policy environment to enable women participate more effectively in poverty alleviation strategies.

The challenge for women, therefore, is for them to (continue to) see their role in poverty alleviation as indispensable, but at the same time, complementary to those of the men and the governments.

These considerations appear crucial to the issue of rural poverty alleviation as Africa prepares for the next century.

## **The Role of Muslim Women in Moorish Empire Implications for Women in Islam Today**

By

**Dr. Protus Kemdirim & Nubia Kai**

### *Introduction*

"The results of Mohammed have been greatly underestimated. In the century after Mohammed's death it wrestled Asia Minor, Africa, and Spain from Christianity, more than half of the civilised world, and established a civilisation, the highest in the world during the Dark Ages. It brought the Arabian race to their highest development, raised the position of women in the East, though it retained polygamy, was intensively monotheistic, and until the Turks gained control, for the most part encouraged progress."<sup>1</sup>

The flourishing Moorish Empire of Northwest Africa and Spain, called the "Empire of the Two Shores", was a culture in harmony with Shariah, and on a practical level they represented an ideal Muslim society. The artistic excellence, brilliant literary output, invention in architecturing of an egalitarian social, political and economic system, the high respect and position of women, the revival of mysticism and ancient philosophy were all evidence of the practical application of Shariah, where both the inner and outer dimensions of culture are in harmony. This balance or harmony pervades every facet of culture: the arts, the sciences, education, social equality, ethics, mythology and ritual.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to show that as far back as the Moorish empire, African women enjoyed a freedom and respect that women now only dream about. As a matter of fact, their literary output, prominence in sculpture, painting, crafts, philosophy, theology, medicine, administration, displayed a far greater freedom, independence, and eminence than other women of the world at that time. Strictly speaking, no woman in the

historical period of Aha to Muhammad attained the level of activity, equanimity and esteem as the African Muslim woman of the Moorish Empire.

### *The Legacy of Muhammad*

To understand fully the reason for the high position and status of women in the Moorish Empire, it is necessary to go back to the period Muhammad first received the revelation of the Quran and made major changes in the decadent social and political systems that had stagnated Arabia and many other parts of the world. The Quran as well as the teaching and life-style of Muhammad account for the progressive development.

In the first place, the Quranic emphasis on Unity, Brotherhood, liberation from oppression and ignorance, equality, the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom for both men and women, brought on a revolution in the treatment and status of women of Saudi Arabia and the African Muslim world.

Second, Muhammad as the great paragon of the ideal Islamic personality left a legacy of exemplary activity in his *Sunnah* (Way of life). He was a loving husband and father, kind and gentle to his wives, daughters, friends, and the women who came to him. He showed a fatherly affection to all women even those who hated and abused him.<sup>3</sup> At home Muhammad assisted his wives with their household chores - cooking, sewing and cleaning -, and took a keen interest in their vocations, hobbies, characters and thinking. Though he contracted marriage with several women later in his life, he was a devoted monogamist for over a quarter of a century with his first wife, Khadija.

The prophet, Muhammad, had the utmost love and reverence for women and has left a plethora of sayings extolling their rights and virtues. When asked by one of his companions what were the things he loved most in this world, he replied: "Prayer, women and perfume."<sup>4</sup> He loved women most in this world and consummated that love in the radical changes he made in the status of women, guaranteeing their divine rights as equal, independently thinking

human beings and extolling their virtues and their importance to culture. When Muhammad was asked who was most deserving of kindness and respect in this life, he replied, "your mother, and then your father." The mother is to be shown three times more kindness and respect than the father. They receive as the mother of the nation. From them culture blooms and finds its sustenance". The Prophet also used to say: "paradise lies at the foot of the mother". An even greater value was assigned to the woman of virtue. "The world and all things in it are valuable, but the most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman."<sup>5</sup>

From all surviving accounts, Muhammad had a spiritually deep and loving relationship with his wife Khadija, and in no instance do we find a male dominance of the household in the prophet's *sunnah*. Muhammad and the men of the *Sahaba* were "servants of their homes," helping the women with household chores, caring for children, educating their daughters, taking them from the infanticidal sands to the highest thrones of respect and honours, and fighting side by side with them in war.<sup>6</sup> Indeed Muhammad's regard and respect for women is seen in the famous saying to his followers:

He is most perfect in Islam whose disposition is best; and the best of you are they who behave best to your wives.<sup>7</sup>

### *Equality for Women*

The Moorish model was a fulfilment of the Islamic ideal of equality for women. Women during this era held high ranking positions and professions along with the men. It is interesting to note that in the great days of Mohammedan Spain, Arabian women were not confined, as in the East to harems, but appeared freely in public and took their full share in all the intellectual, literary and even scientific movements of the day. Women held schools in some of the principal towns. There were women poets, historians and philosophers as well as women surgeons and doctors.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed during the Prophet's time women were encouraged to study, learn and "seek knowledge even if they had to go to China." Women in *Jahalliya* (days of ignorance) Arabia, who were owned like property, now became the rightful heirs of their own property, and while the man is enjoined to provide for the woman and children, the woman has right to spend her money as she pleases. Radical changes were made in the economic system once women were given control of the nation's surplus wealth. Much of this wealth was spent for social causes, the building of schools, mosques, universities, libraries, museums, hospitals, the kinds of charitable institutions women (given the opportunity) have supported throughout history. In the same vein, forced marriages, circumcision, quick divorces, the burial of new-born daughters, the buying and selling of women were abolished in Islam.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, with monotheistic fervour, women were enjoined not to submit to men but to God alone, for men too can become evil gods to them. Men and women were therefore *awalliya*, "guardians and protecting friends of each other," a *yin-yang* complement in thinking, counsel, advice, values and activity.

Muhammad taught women that they were the creators of civilisation. Thus in their marriage with the cosmogenic roots in Islam, African Muslim women became an enlightened, liberated group who made a substantial contribution to the development of Moorish civilisation. It should be observed that the hard core patriarchy generally associated with Muslim society was absent here. Men and women mingled freely in public and private and extra-marital friendships with members of the opposite sex was encouraged.<sup>10</sup> Though it was probably not matriarchal society in the fullest sense, what we find instead is a matriarchal-patriarchal balance stemming from the idealisation of romantic lives that had its rebirth and importation to the West from Moorish culture. The realisation of ideal love was a favourite theme of Moorish novelists, poets, painters, troubadours, and the allegorization of women as the object of divine union became the most widely used metaphor in Sufi poetry.<sup>11</sup> What we have in the Moorish example is a revolution in male-female relationship based on an emotional



and spiritual bonding of mutual love, understanding, and compassion. These kinds of relationships seem to mitigate either a patriarchal or matriarchal dominance, for the fact that they have achieved a union in their own relationship that neutralises duality. As metaphysicians say: the energy emitted from the union of opposites is love. Still there were many features of Moorish culture that were matriarchal in character and direction. For example, the prevailing icon and religious sculpture of the Black Madonna and child, the symbol of the *Kaaba* and black mother; dynasties with matrilineal descent;<sup>12</sup> women as pioneers of education, taking part in every profession, every science, every art; women as great mystics and healers and arising like an ancient goddess as a symbol of the Divine Being in popular literature. Though the female did not dominate the male, neither did she acquiesce to him.

Matriarchal societies, now buried under the bigoted sands of prehistory, nevertheless, did exist. Mythologies, ancient legends, hymns, iconography all attest to the existence of a matriarchal order that preceded the patriarchal; and one of the most obvious remnants of that time is the matrilineal lines of royal descent found universally in African societies, and which Diop delineated in his *Two Cradle Theory* as a major component of African cultural continuity.<sup>13</sup>

Isis, the symbol of the quintessential Black woman, is described in numerous myths, tales and hymns as the one who taught the arts, mathematics, alchemy, astronomy, medicine, writing, weaving, ceramic, and laid out the social judiciary laws governing human relations.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, there is a constellation of historical antecedents in the relatively high status of women in the Nile Valley civilisation, and later, North and West Africa.

The *Kaaba* itself appears to symbolise both civilisation and the Black woman; it is the burial shrine of an Ethiopian woman under whose skirt civilisation was born. The word *Kaaba* is a compound of two complementary aspects of the soul whose dimensions form the base of the pyramid. In ancient Mexico, the black chabbah stones symbolised the sacred authority bestowed on the

Quezacatl's who were the messengers of cultural innovation and civilisation.<sup>15</sup>

The Muslim pilgrimage or Hajj, named after Hajjar, is a ritual re-enacting the peregrinations of Hajjar while she attempts to save the life of her sick son, Ishmael. The circumambulation of the *Kaaba*,<sup>16</sup> the most crucial part of the Hajj ceremony, is the ritual calling up of her spirit, a spirit of civilisation, faith, learning, enlightenment. The fact that the most important ceremonial ritual in Islam is an invocation to the civilising spirit of an enlightened Ethiopian woman seems to suggest that her presence must be fully known in the world for its order, harmony, and preservation. For she is *Ma*, the first creation, Goddess of Harmony, Justice, Truth. She is Isis, the etheric life substance from which all things are moulded. Whatever her state of mind or consciousness, this is reflected in the consciousness of her people. Therefore, the Native Americans would say, "When the woman is sick, the society is sick." And that "man is the striking arm of woman." Man carries out the instructions of her mental blueprints. Once those blue prints mirror the reality of the cosmic world, the humanist vision of peace can be realised. To this end the Islamic symbols and rituals were designed, and the spiritual forces of progress have been turning its wheel in this direction ever since the fall of woman.

### *Reversals*

The Muslim conquest of North Africa, like the Muslim conquest of Spain, was for all intents and purposes, a revolution. The white christian hegemony was broken, lands were confiscated and redistributed to the poor, equitable social and judicial laws were enacted, and autonomy was restored to the indigenous population.<sup>17</sup> As earlier observed, Muhammad in particular was very much concerned about the rights and dignity of women. Thus the Prophet would proclaim:

"The rights of women are sacred. See that women are maintained in rights assigned to them."<sup>18</sup>

It is surprising, however, that the early Muslim civilisation of Africa and Asia suffered untold reversals. In fact, considering the common opinion that the Muslim religion is oppressive to women, the questions are raised: What did just happen to these sacred rights? What or who changed the liberating tide of Islam to one of oppression? When did all this occur?

One thing is clear. At the early stages of each religious revolt women are liberated and given equal status with men until the cyclical backlash of barbarianism and male dominance takes over, erasing and interpolating sacred texts, reversing myths, icons, and maxims to justify male dominance. The revolution in Buddhism, Christianity and Islam was short-circuited by the intrusion of bad ideas from the barbarians, stealing the treasures, the banning of women from public meetings, from receiving an education, or from making rightful claims to their property. The restrictions of women in Islam made an opposite turn from the initial revelation, and the pitiable oppression of women in Islam today is the result.<sup>19</sup> Kaukah Siddique explicitly names the influence of the Ottoman Turks as what changed the liberation tide of Islam to one of oppression. He states:

If a date has to be place on the finalization of the secondary status given to women in Muslim lands, I am inclined to use 1258 C.C, the year in which Halaqu Khan plundered Baghdad and set fire to the stores of knowledge accumulated through centuries of scholarship.<sup>20</sup>

### *Implications*

The rights and activities of women in Islam during the Moorish Empire arguably has far reaching implications both for women and Islam in contemporary times. For one, from Isis to Nitocris, Hatshepsut, Tiye, Nefertitti, Queen Makeda, Cleopatra VII, the

Kentake Queens of Cush, to Queen Nzinga, Amina, Sarrounia, Yaasantewa, Nehanda, on across the waters to Nana Achaampong, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary McCleod Bethune, Black women can draw on an inexhaustible source of inspiration and intelligence from the blood and memories of their foremothers. Indeed, when the fruits of such female geniuses are reaped on a large scale as it was in Africa and Spain, new civilisations are born out of the knowledge of the old. Moorish women, true to their ancestral paragons, ardently took the reins of nation building in their hands like the two African women who founded the first Islamic University at Kairowan, laying out the rudiments of the same university system used today: the Sufi mystical schools of the renowned mystic-saint, Fatima, who were the secret of the great saints of Spain; or Queen Zaynab Al-Natzawiya of the Almoravid Dynasty, who was the driving force behind the Almoravid conquest of the Two Empires; or the famed singer and poet Zumar.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed at the dawning of civilisation it was the woman who pulled off the covers of darkness with the rising sun of female creative intuition - the ability to dream a world into being. The essence and roots of culture were symbolically linked to the woman's womb, the first source of cultural development. Women are the wellspring from which culture springs; they are culture-bearers. Hence they are the measuring rod of cultural progress, as Nkrumah and Malcom-X both were to notice. The progressive energy of a nation, according to them, was directly related to the position of its women. DuBois had written earlier, that the "progress of the Negro race depended on the dignity and intelligence of Black women." Thus African Muslim women today must somehow resurrect from the ashes of oppression and take their destiny in their hands. Herein lies the challenge of the African woman. She must relink the *Ka* to the *Ba*, reclaim the crown of high culture and civilisation, and make revolution a reality.

## Conclusion

From all that has been discussed above, it is obvious that the position and status of women in Islam during the Moorish period was equal to none contrary to the current restriction and oppression of women found in Muslim societies. It is sad that judging by the present condition of Muslim women, the woman has a long way to walk to freedom. That the African Muslim woman today has consented to the betrayal of selfhood is perhaps the most tragic aspect of this oppression, for it is largely self-inflicted by its admission to inferiority and compliance to a status contradictory to human nature. It is important, however, that women in Islam should take their place in history like soldiers of the night and be the protectors of their nations again. Indeed the women should realise that the most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman. Her virtue being the nation's virtue; her wholeness, health and intelligence, the nation's wholeness, health and intelligence; her wealth, the nation's wealth. Above all, it should be known that the oppression of women is antithetical to the teachings of Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Manley P Hall, *Secret Teaching of All Ages*. Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1977 p. 49

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Lane Poole, *The Moors of Spain*, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990 pp. vii - ix

<sup>3</sup> There is a story of the Prophet, who during the early days of his prophethood used to pass everyday by a woman's house on the way home. The woman was an opponent of his new teaching and showed her scorn by throwing her slop water on him each day while he passed her house. One day the woman did not come out, and the prophet, sensing she was sick, went to see about her. After the visit she realised Muhammad was a Prophet and became a Muslim.

<sup>4</sup> Hakim Moinddin Chisti, *The Book of Sufi Healing*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, Inc., p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Al Mamum Al-Suhrawardy, *The Sayings of Muhammad*. New York: Carol Pub. Co., 1990 pp. 97, 111

<sup>6</sup> Kaukab Siddique, *The Liberation of Women Through Islam*. Kingsville, MD: American Society for Education and Religion, 1990, pp. 60 - 63

<sup>7</sup> Al-Suhrawardy, *op. cit*, p. 116

<sup>8</sup> Lady Lugard, *Tropical Dependency*, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1905, p. 49

<sup>9</sup> Siddique, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 - 4, 71

<sup>10</sup> In Leo Africannus. *History of Africa III*. New York: Burt Franklin Pub. p. 427, he describes the mingling of men and women at the public baths. "Here men and after they have done bathing use to banquet and make merry with pleasant music and singing". There is another instance where Ibn Battuta visits a Saharan Town and notices that the wife of his Almoravid host is talking. He questions his host about who the visitor is he replied, "that is my wife's friend. And you allow her to sit in bed with another man in your presence?" Battuta was amazed and appalled by his liberality. "There is nothing wrong in it. We consider it an honour. Our women are not like yours". See *Travels of Ibn Battuta IV*, Millwood, N.Y., Kraus Reprint, Hakuyt Society, 1971

<sup>11</sup> The novels, poetry and treatises of Moorish civilisation were overflowing with the idea of love, divine, moral human or profane. It was the favourite subject of the poet, novelist, the storyteller, the mystic. The use of woman as metaphor and allegory of divine union reached its peak in the Sufi poetry of Moorish Spain. The custom of serenading their beloved under the moonlight, chivalry, romance, knighthood, were all borrowed from Moorish culture. What was idealised in Europe as *romantic love*, was realised by the Moors. Yet, more than romantic it was an intimate spiritually refining relationship, more of the tantric order, where the partner is contemplated as an epiphany of the Divine Being. See Henry Corbin, *The Creative Imagination of Ibn Arabi*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969

<sup>12</sup> Norris, T H, *Saharan Myths And Legends*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 39

<sup>13</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop. *Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, Chicago: Third World Press, 1978, pp. 27 - 37

<sup>14</sup> Daryl Ford, *Cleopatra*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Van Sertina, *They Came Before Columbus*. New York: Random House, 1976 p. 75

<sup>16</sup> Kaaba or caaba is the small, nearly cubical stone building in the court of the Great Mosque at Mecca, which contains the sacred black rock, thought by Muslims to have been given by Gabriel to Abraham. It is the object of annual pilgrimage, and worship centre to which Moslems turn in daily prayer.

<sup>17</sup> Poole, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 - 44

<sup>18</sup> Al - Suhrawardy, *op. cit.* p 118

<sup>19</sup> Kaukah Siddique, *The Struggle of Muslim Women*. Kingsville MD: American Society for Education and Religion, 1983, p 48

<sup>20</sup> Siddique, *op. cit.*, pp. 54 - 55

<sup>21</sup> Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 105

## Christ, Women and Culture: Model for the Nigerian Society

By

Olajubi Oyeronke

### *Abstract*

Patriarchal societies usually ascribe subordinate status to women on the average. Examples of such societies include, the Jewish society, the African society and the ancient Near East to some extent. This may not be unconnected with the belief that women are meant to follow, at all times while the men lead by divine sanction. Christ lived in the Jewish society and was influenced as much as he influenced the society. By Jewish prescription Jesus could be described as a non-conformist; he proposed alternatives to laid down prescriptions within the traditional Jewish society. The status and role of women happen to be one of such alternative teachings. The aim of this paper is to examine the reasons adduced for the non-conformist attitude of Jesus to laid down regulations within the Jewish society and the implications of such. Another aim of the paper is to examine the implication of the above discussed situation for women and the society in contemporary Nigeria. We hope at the end of the paper to suggest ways by which Jesus' submissions could help Christian women and men in Nigeria today. Suggestions may also be made on the application of such a situation for Christian leaders in the contemporary Nigerian society.

### *Women in the Jewish Culture*

The Jewish society from which the Old Testament evolved reflects the prevailing treatment of women as subordinates. The woman's duty was to care for her husband and children; she could own property through her husband. The Jewish law addresses only

men; women are not considered legally responsible. The sayings of the Elders in the Jewish society are a good reflection of the status ascribed to women in the Jewish setting. According to Rabbinic traditions, "To teach the law to a woman was to cast pearls to the swine."<sup>1</sup> Societal regulation and norms forbid a man to speak to or ask for any type of service from a woman on the street. In the same vein, women were denied any access to the law; rather than give the book of the law to a woman, it is better to burn it. Phyllis Bird rightly illustrates the cultural treatment of women in the Jewish setting when he says:

One only needs to see the genealogies of the Old Testament (Gen.5:10 and (1Chron. 1 and 2) in order to see that the Biblical world is a man's world, for the genealogies are fundamentally lists of males in which women do not normally appear. As is well known, ancient Jewish society as well as that of Greco - Roman world were essentially male dominated.<sup>2</sup>

It therefore becomes glaring that the lot of women in the Jewish setting was that of inequality and subordination at all fronts, not necessarily because of their inadequacies but due to prescribed traditions enacted and enforced by men.

### *Jesus and Women in a Jewish Setting*

Jesus interacted with women throughout his ministry at different levels. A. Briggs submits that "The fact of suffering is nothing new to women, for they have always borne their young ones in pain and lived their days in frequent tears before man's aggressions."<sup>3</sup> Jesus in recognition of this plight of women attended to their various needs and thus ensured both their physical and spiritual well-being. Jesus taught women the truth of life, just as he instructed men. With Jesus a woman is first a person, an entity, a personality, an individual and then a woman. As far as cultural traditions in dealing with women in the Jewish setting was concerned Jesus could be described as a non-conformist. Loyal as Jesus was to his



Jewish inheritance, he was both critical and faithful also. With him the dichotomy between the male and female ceases to exist because in him all are equal. Women ministered to the needs of Jesus and his disciples just as he took care of their own needs. Examples of such women include, Mary, Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Salome. Against Jewish tradition, Jesus interacts with women openly, (John 4:27, Lk. 10:39, 13:16, Mk. 1:29 and John 11:1-44). Jesus therefore opened the privileges of religious faith equally to men and women. The fact that Jesus did not appoint a woman as one of his twelve disciples is best understood in the light of the subordinate status of women in the Jewish setting as of this period. It is certainly not due to the inability of women to perform such duties creditably.

### *The Christian Woman and Culture in Nigeria*

Various definitions have been proffered for culture. For the purpose of this paper, we would like to define culture as a social phenomenon with various separable parts. It is a way of thinking and an approach to life. Neither theology nor anthropology can say decisively when culture began, but it can be submitted that God is responsible for culture, because God created humankind in such a way that humans are culture-producing beings.

Scholars through the years have expressed different shades of opinion as regards what the attitude of the Christian should be to culture. To some, God is opposed to culture because culture is identifiable with "the world", hence the essence of culture is evil<sup>4</sup> (I John 2:15-16 and 5:19). Early missionaries to Africa subscribe to this stand as deduced from their utterances and actions as concerns the African culture. Viewed critically, however, this position is based on some premises that can be described as fallacies: One, equating culture as a concept with only the negative use of the Greek word *Kosmos* in the New Testament; Two, assuming that culture is only an external thing to humans; and three, assuming that since satan is able to use culture to his ends, all of culture is evil.

It is worthy to note that culture, especially African culture, is within as well as around the individual. In fact the culture of the African cannot be separated from his/her orientation, mission and vision in life. The African is inalienably bound to and by his/her culture. As Charles H. Kraft has rightly noted "cultural structures are best regarded as a vehicle or milieu, neutral in essence, though warped by the pervasive influence of human sinfulness."<sup>5</sup>

Culture therefore is not to be seen as an enemy or friend but rather as something that can be employed by human beings. Bearing in mind the enormous potential of culture for the African it therefore becomes glaring that for Christianity to be meaningful in an African setting the importance of culture cannot be undermined. The authenticity of the above claim has already been established by the African Independent Churches in Nigeria. While Christianity is sin-denying, it is not world-denying.

Women in Christianity in Nigerian are operating within the African culture. The effect of this on women is double faced. One, is the need for the authorities and policy makers of Christianity to yield to calls for a re-appraisal of the subordination of women in the church and allow women to occupy leadership cadres if they are so qualified. The Bible prescribes equality in the Body of Christ and it is the duty of the church to enforce this. As John Totte and R. Coote note:

A special responsibility rests on Christians to be sensitive to the movement of history to discern the signs of the times, to distinguish between that which is of real advantage and that which has a merely deceptive attractiveness, to ensure that the will of God becomes the criterion of change and that the whole life of ~~man~~ is conformed to the likeness of Christ and renewed according to the pattern which God himself has revealed to us in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

This is also closely related to the status of women in African culture. Women are not denied participation in leadership positions, especially in the religious realm. This is based on the

African belief of the need to maintain a balance in their cosmology and their relationship with the supersensible world.

Two, is the need for Christian women in Nigeria to appreciate the African culture and not discard it in its entirety as being evil. While there are some customs and practices within every given culture that Christianity cannot condone due to Biblical injunctions, there are others that can be utilised to further the course of the gospel. While Christianity cannot accommodate witchcraft of any kind, twin-murder, cannibalism, physical mutilation and ritual prostitution to mention a few, the African concept of hospitality and being your brother's keeper is worthy of emulation. The Bible enjoins Christians to care not only for friends but for enemies as well. Marrying this biblical injunction with the African hospitality for example can only mean a plus for Christianity.

Moreover, there is the need for the Christian women in Nigeria to appreciate and develop the African way of dressing and behavioural patterns. Respect and humility are two concepts distinct from stupidity. Both respect and humility are recommended by both the Bible and African culture, women need to heed such advice. Less emphasis should be placed on the Western mode of dressing while the focus is shifted to the African mode of dressing which is more complimentary to the physical features of the Nigerian woman.

Conclusively, we would like to stress the need for the Nigerian Christian woman to cultivate a cultural identity which is crucial to her total appreciation of the Christian message in an African setting.

### *Recommendations*

Jesus' attitude to women as persons first and then as personalities is strongly recommended for policy makers in Christianity today. It is only in this light that the spirit of Galatians 3:28 can prevail.

Women need to identify more with the African culture being Africans. This is to facilitate a deeper appreciation of the christian message in a cultural setting.

There is the need to identify and appreciate the fact that culture as a concept is neither a friend nor an enemy but a vehicle that can be employed by entities for a desired goal. The New Testament and consequently Christianity is therefore not against culture. In fact the New Testament attitude to cultural values can be described as positive, (Rev. 21:24 - 26).

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<sup>1</sup> W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, Edinburgh, St. Andrew Press, 1956, p. 160

<sup>2</sup> Phyllis, A. Bird *The Bible as the Church's Book*, Philadelphia, West Minster Press, 1982, p.62

<sup>3</sup> Argye Briggs, *Christ and Modern Woman*, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960, p. 15

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, New York: Orbis Books, 1984, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 113

<sup>6</sup> J. Totte and R Coote, *Down to Earth, Studies in Christianity and Culture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, p. 13

## **The Place of Women in The New Testament House Codes** **An Exegetical Analysis of 1Tim 3,11-15 & 1Cor 14,33b-35**

By

Chinedu Adolphus Amadi-Azuogu c.m.f.

### *Introduction*

The man Paul has been accused as the one who, in his writings, planted a feminist "time-bomb" which has continued to explode throughout the course of Christian history. This assertion is made because this *explosion claims only women as its casualties, since it is only targeted against them*. In view of this, the woman of today is very worried, since a culture of systematic discrimination has emerged. She is placed on the margin and exploited as if she were nobody.

However, it has to be pointed out from the very beginning that inadequate knowledge of biblical exegesis has fanned this type of misinformation and bias against Paul. The reason for this is that those who see him as the author of the unfortunate subordination of women simply take the thirteen letters in the NT bearing his name as exclusively coming from him. These people ignore the fact that information from the Pastorals (as we shall soon see), for instance, depicts a post-Pauline tradition and portrays a turbulent doctrinal period. Linda M. Maloney was aware of this when she said: "I believe that the Pastorals are pseudepigraphical: their author is someone other than Paul desiring to claim Pauline authority for his ideas." Nonetheless, on the false premise that everything bearing the name of Paul must necessarily have come from Paul himself, two sets of information about women in early Christianity were mixed up. The result is that this group of people came to the false but regrettable conclusion that the subordination texts of the NT *house codes* coming from the deutero-Pauline sources<sup>2</sup> are also from Paul himself. In this way, Paul is unfortunately misrepresented as the author of the subordination of

women; as one who formed a viper in embryo which mercilessly bites women throughout the course of Christian history. Hence, the central preoccupation of this short exegetical investigation is to use one of such texts attributed to Paul to correct this erroneous impression about him. It is true that *something is rotten in the state of Denmark*, but the cause is to be sought where things went wrong. In view of this the present article will examine the pieces of evidence about the subordination of women found in what is technically called the *house codes*<sup>3</sup> of the NT or in German the *Haustafel*.

Why are these texts so called? They deal with order both in the family and in the church. Broadly speaking, they follow a consistent pattern, making use of the following pairs: man - woman; parents - child; slave - master.

The main preoccupation here was with *order* in the family. Here various levels of subordination are expressed, with the man always at the head. This is a code which seemingly confined the activities of the woman to the family and defines her place and role in the house and sometimes in the church.<sup>4</sup> However, since these texts are quite numerous, for the sake of this article, we shall concentrate on the texts of 1Tim 3,11-15 and 1Cor 33b-35.

*Let The Women Keep Silent 1Tim 2,11-15 & 1Cor 14,33b-35*

### *Preliminary Remarks*

As the reader will soon see, the NT subordination of women entered a crucial phase in these texts. In these texts, the coffin was nailed; Christian women became muzzled and gagged. They will have to be treated this way for being women and for being created so by God. Indeed, from the subordination of the woman in the family (as seen in Eph 5,22-33; Col 3,18-19 etc.), we have now come to the subordination of this same woman in the church of God. Rules will now be made to muzzle her mouth in the church. Free speech will now be a luxury that cannot be afforded. An eternal ban will now be imposed on her on account of a biological

difference in gender. They will now be interdicted and proscribed. This signals to us that we have now arrived at a sad ecclesiological juncture, the prohibition of women from speaking in the church of God. Here it is no longer about a house code, but now about a church code, which spells out the place of women in the church and how these women are supposed to behave before men in the Christian assembly. As will soon be seen, this code clearly *proscribes* and *forbids* these women from carrying out certain functions in the church.

In the two sets of texts shortly to be analysed, we shall see how the men who shaped the NT "usurped" divine power and imposed an eternal ban on women not to speak in the church which is supposed to belong to them and to these men *on equal terms*. The unfortunate thing about this ban is that it is done in the name of the Holy Scripture, thus giving the false impression that this is also the revelation of God. It is a situation, such as we have in these texts, which prompted the feminist Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to maintain that no text which destroys the personal and human worth of women can be the revealed Word of God.<sup>5</sup> However, the biblical authors in our study did not pay attention to this. They were not satisfied with the provisions of the house code which subordinated women to men in the family. In view of this, they decided to extend this to the level of the church. This means that these women should be under men not only in the family but also in the church.

Indeed, if our criticism of the authors of the subordination of women in the house codes was mild, it will not be enough to do the same here. The two authors below have laid down very firmly the foundation of an unfortunate situation in which women suffer, *even today in our church*. Will women ever forgive them? It is in relation to this that Linda M. Maloney made this observation:

At the same time, these letters are both frustrating and depressing to the Christian woman who reads them: their tone (especially as regards women and their roles) is negative to the point of ferocity, and it is this negative and

oppressive quality that has dominated interpretation and authoritative application of these texts in the succeeding two millennia.<sup>6</sup>

With this in mind, these authors applied a typical temple or synagogue mentality in which the woman was supposed to be purely passive and quiet. Accordingly, in the synagogues these women were assigned special places behind a screen,<sup>7</sup> from where they acted like silent spectators. So these authors were working within a tradition of this kind inherited from their Jewish past. With these preliminary remarks, let us now begin a reading of the texts involved. The two texts will be studied together because they have so many similarities.

#### **1Cor 14,33b-35**

33b Hôs en pasais tais.ekklêsiais  
tôn hagiôn 34 hai gynaikes en  
tais ekklêsiais sigatôsan oy gar  
epitrepetai autais lalein, alla  
hypotassésthōsan, kathōs kai ho  
nomos legei; 35 ei de ti mathein  
thelousin, en oikō tous idious  
andras eperôtātōsan; aischron  
gar estin gynaiki lalein en  
ekklêsia.

#### **Translation**

33b As in all the churches of the  
saints 34 let the women in all the  
churches keep silence; For it is  
not permitted to them to speak,  
they should be submissive, even as  
the law says; 35 If there is  
anything they want to know, let  
them ask their husbands at home;  
for it is disgraceful for a woman to  
speak in the church

#### **1Tim 2,11-15**

11 gynê en hêsychia manthanetô en pasê  
hypotagê. 12 didaskein de gynaiki ouk  
epitrepô oude authentein andros, all'einai  
en hêsychia. 13 Adam gar prôtos  
eplasthê, eita Hêva. 14 kai Adam ouk  
êpatêthê, hê de gynê exapatêtheisa en  
parabasei gegonen; 15 sôthêsetai de dia  
tês teknogonias, ean meinôsin en pistei  
kai agapê kai hagiasmô meta  
sôphrosynês; 3,1 pistos ho logos.

#### **Translation**

11 *Let the woman learn in silence* in all  
submissiveness; 12 So I do not permit  
any woman either to teach or to  
domineer man, but to be in silence. 13  
For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14  
And Adam was not deceived, but the  
woman was deceived and [consequently]  
became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be  
saved through child-bearing, if she  
remains in faith and love and holiness  
with sobriety.

The reader sees that the contents of both texts are basically the same and directed against the same persons (women). On the one



hand, these women are not permitted to teach and on the other hand they are ordered to be silent and to be submissive in the church. The language is very tough and both texts are very uncompromising in their hostile reaction against women speaking or teaching in the church. In both traditions, the subordination of women reaches its turning point.

These two texts present a textual critical problem to the exegete. If it is argued that Paul was not against women, why do we suddenly find such a hostile and anti-feminist text in a letter (1 Corinthians) attributed to him and recognised as coming from him? Does the exegete now not find himself boxed into a literary corner, where he must now resort to the apologetic game? Is he not in a dilemma and on a cross-road? Is there now no impasse? How can one resolve this *apparent* contradiction in Paul, without explaining away the problem just to uphold the thesis that Paul was not against women? This is the first task now before us. So let us try to resolve this riddle.

#### a). *Textual Evidence*<sup>8</sup>

The first thing that the critical reader notices is that the text of 1Cor 14,33b-35 is in a very awkward position, especially when it is seen in the overall context of the Pauline discussion of the charismatic gifts (1Cor 12-14) in which it is found. Is this text Pauline or not? And is the idea contained therein from Paul himself or not? We do not intend to take up all the details of the arguments here.<sup>9</sup> However, suffice it to point out that the manuscripts themselves are *confused*. They were not even sure where to fit this awkward text. This already points to the problematic nature of 1Cor 14,33b-35. Indeed, we have these three sets of manuscript evidence:

- (i). The following sample manuscripts retain the text of 1Cor 34-35 where it is now, that is coming after 1Cor 14.33, as one finds in the RSV. These manuscripts are: p<sup>46</sup>, 8, A, B, K, Y and several others. These are mainly the Alexandrian witnesses.

(ii). Others, mainly the Western witnesses, place this 1Cor 34-35 after 1Cor 14,40. These include: D, F, G, 8, 8\* and many others.

(iii). In the codex Fuldensis, these verses were inserted at the margin after 14,33. In other words, this very document was totally confused, unsure what to do with the text of 1Cor 14,33-35. The fact that the editors of this very manuscript placed it on the margin can be interpreted to mean that they did not recognise it as an authentic Pauline text. It is possible that they considered it as an interpolation or an editorial appendix coming from a non-Pauline hand. If this were not the case, it becomes difficult to explain why they had to place it where they did..

Whatever is the case, the reader sees that the text of 1Cor 14,33b-35 began to raise problems as early as the history of textual criticism. The doubt which we have today, about its authenticity as Pauline, was already present from the earliest possible time. In effect, we see that even the ancient scribes were not so sure of what to do with this unit. Two reasons can account for this uncertainty. In the first place, it is awkward in the context of the discussion on charismatic gifts where it is found. Secondly, it displays an acute inconsistency with the usual Pauline attitude towards women. So from the manuscript tradition and transmission, its Pauline authorship is already questionable. Therefore, this does not permit us with certainty to say that it is a Pauline text. Consequently, the idea present in the text is also suspect as Pauline. So the benefit of the doubt goes to Paul.

#### *b). The Context Of 1Cor 14,33b-35*

The next thing that we intend to do now is to examine the context in which this controversial text is found. First of all, it is situated within the context of the Pauline discussion on the charismatic gifts. The language of the questionable text at stake is completely at odds with the overall language of 1Cor 12-14. Any one reading

this unit sees that 1Cor 14,33b-35 suddenly breaks up the logic and the sequence of the discussion and abruptly introduces a topic outside the universe of discourse. Besides, this contradicts the overall approach found in the letter. Indeed, in 1Cor 11,5, Paul allows women to prophesy in the church, despite the problem which the whole unit (11,2-16) raises. In which case, he did not impose silence on them.<sup>10</sup> Paul is out to re-unite the divided Corinthians (1Cor 1,10-17). His language was love-oriented, appealing to all to work harmoniously.

Indeed, if one removes 1Cor 14,33b-35 there is a perfect link with the rest of the discussion. This points to the fact that 1Cor 14,33b-35 is an editorial insertion from somebody at home with the tradition of the pastoral epistles, who possibly felt that Paul has gone too far in granting so many concessions to women. He therefore made this corrective remark to try to set the clock "right" from his own Jewish perspective.

### c). *The Pauline Tradition*

Next, it has also to be pointed out that the introductory part of 1Cor 14,33b-35 does not reflect the reality in the Pauline church. In 1Cor 14,33b-34, the pseudo-Pauline author makes it clear that the ban on women exists in all the churches which he knows - *hōs en pasais tais ekklesiáis* (as in all the churches). From this we learn that *in all the churches* known to the author of the controversial text that it is customary for women not to speak in the church. *This is a practice not seen in the Pauline churches* but perhaps a feature of the deutero-Pauline churches, as we see in the *pastorals* (1&2 Tim; Titus). The churches which the author has in mind are seemingly these churches of the Pastoral epistles. Otherwise, this practice is not attested in Paul. In effect, this points towards a different authorship of the text in question.

Finally, based on the manuscript evidence adduced above, I ascribe to the solution found in the Codex Fuldensis, where 1Cor 14,33b-35 was simply placed at the margin after 14,33. In this case, I would label this text a pseudo-Pauline text or an editorial

remark.<sup>11</sup> It works against all that we know of Paul. It has an unambiguous affinity with the Pastoral letters. We shall try to look for its authorship in this direction.

#### d). *Literary Affinity With The Pastorals*

A close examination of the text of 1Cor 14,33b-35 and that of 1Tim 2,11-12 (as one can see above) reveals an obvious similarity in style, vocabulary, idea and emphasis. Let us concentrate on a comparison of the two texts for the moment.

(i) Both texts are very insistent and unambiguous on the silence of the woman in the Christian assembly. This becomes only an assembly of men, with the women members only passively in attendance. The women are to participate as "dumb" people, saying or uttering nothing. They are simply to attend as the "yes" members of the Christian assembly.<sup>12</sup> In imposing this silence, both texts used a common word *sigao* - to keep silent or to be quiet. Also the same verb *epitrepō* (to allow or permit someone) was used to refuse women the permission to teach in the church.

(ii) Both texts made a common appeal to Scripture (the account of the fall) in proposing their subordination-ecclesiology. However, some differences are also found. Whereas 1Tim 2 mentions the text of Scripture concerned, 1Cor 14,33a-35 only says that the law said so.

(iii) These two texts reflect the mood of the *house codes* in relation to women. Hence, the radical and extreme subordination which one sees in Ephesians is again repeated in these two traditions.

The stand to be taken in this work, when this literary similarity, text critical evidence and all other arguments are assembled together, is that 1Cor 14,33b-35 offers no convincing reason to believe that it belongs to Paul. Based on all the evidence having a bearing on the case, my own position is that it belongs to the same tradition or to a similar tradition with 1Tim 2.<sup>13</sup> I think that we

have the case of pseudonymity here. Somebody (perhaps, a pious orthodox Jewish disciple from the school of the Pastorals) has written in the name of Paul in order to try to reduce the influence of his liberally proclaimed freedom and equality. With this, let us now go into the details of the exegesis involved, beginning with the controversial 1Cor 14,33b-35.

### 1Cor 14,33b-35

(1) This text begins with an introduction - *hôs en pasais tais ekklêsiais tôn hagiôn* ("as in all the churches of the saints"). With this the author alerts his readers that there was an already existing practice in all the churches known to him. He gave this important signal with the use of *hôs* (as). So what he is about to say is nothing new. It is an old custom in what he calls "the churches of the saints". Those to whom he now wants to address probably know this too. In any case, he now proceeds to remind them what this practice is all about.

Next, in 1Cor 14,34, the pseudo-Pauline editor gives us the list of what obtains in "all the churches of the saints". These are:

- a). *hai gynaiques en tais ekklêsiais sigatôsan* let the women in all the churches keep silent
- b). *ou gar epitrepetai autais lalein,* For it is not permitted to them to speak,
- c). *alla hypotassésthôsan, kathôs kai ho nomos legei* but they should be submissive, even as the law says

With this ecclesiastical command *that women should keep silent in the churches* this author carries his own subordination of women from the home into the church. Here these women are to become "dumb" Christian participants in the church which belongs to them and to this writer. They should be present like silent and bereaved mourners. In effect, they have been robbed of initiative. From now on men are the only ones who should speak in the

church and who could legislate for these woman. These women will now be like *outsiders* and *strangers*. They have now become *the silent worshippers of Christianity*, forced to contribute nothing to theological discussions and having no say in dogmatic definitions, making no serious contribution towards church policies. The seriousness of this prohibition order lies in the fact that it is to be *in the churches*.

*This Greek imperative form sigatōsan is from the verb sigāō which is used in the intransitive sense and has the following meaning: (a). to keep silent (b). to say nothing; (c). to stop speaking; (d). to become silent.<sup>14</sup>*

From these various meanings, the reader sees that the author chose his word very carefully and left no room for any ambiguity. He knew what he wanted to say and was very precise about it. As *one* sees, absolute silence was imposed on these women, *all in God's name*. They are to be present like a muzzled ox, uttering no word. So the author gagged them. They have now been fettered and must now organise themselves in liberation movements to break their chains.

This same author will now go further to strengthen his religious ban on women. He does this with this phrase - *ou gar epitrepetai autais lalein* (it is not permitted to them to speak). Here the author shows that he means what he has been saying. So he uses this verb *epitrepetai* (a passive form) from *epitrepō*. Ordinarily, it means to allow, permit, order, instruct. With the infinitive, as we have in our text, it means to permit or allow.<sup>15</sup> But it was negated in our context. The construction is <*ou gar epitrepetai*>, meaning - it is not permitted. So these women are neither permitted nor allowed to speak in the church. This is an unfortunate ecclesiology which also provides the platform for the present day practice in the church:

Finally, the author goes forward to tell us what these women should do. On the contrary (*alla*), he maintains, they should be submissive (*hypotassēsthōsan*). First of all, the use of the word *alla*

(which in general means *but*) plays a contrasting role here. Accordingly, we translate it as "on the contrary" to bring this out. The author is contrasting what these women should not do with what they should do. On the one hand, they are not to speak in the church, but on the other hand, they are to be submissive. Both are extremes which help to create a second class people in Christianity. This author is doing all these things because of the biological gender of those involved. They have to be subjected in this way for the simple reason that they are women. So for this author, it is virtuous for the woman to keep silent in the church and to be subordinated to the man. Simply, she has to accept the authority of the man in all things.<sup>16</sup>

### *The role of hypotassésthōsan*

This is a passive imperative form from the verb *hypotassō*. What does it mean? It is a standard verb of subordination in the NT *house codes*.<sup>17</sup> The noun from it is *hypotagē* which means subjection, subordination, obedience.<sup>18</sup> The verb itself means to subject, to subordinate, to bring someone into subjection. It can also mean to become subject, to subject oneself.<sup>19</sup> This active meaning is to be ruled out in our own context since we have a passive imperative.

This verb also means to place under, to affix under.<sup>20</sup> When it is used in the middle voice (reflexively), it means to acknowledge as lord and master, to lose or surrender one's own rights or will.<sup>21</sup> This is probably the meaning in our own context. In which case, it means: let them be made to surrender their will, let them be made to acknowledge as lord. In this sense, it becomes a hierarchical term used to express one's relationship to a superior.<sup>22</sup> In the *house code*, this verb is also used for the submission of slaves to their masters.<sup>23</sup>

This author now goes forward to hide under the shadow of Scripture to justify his unfriendly statements about women. He insists that the law supports his own position (*kathōs kai ho nomos legei* - even as the law says). We know that the Pentateuch<sup>24</sup> is

sometimes referred to as the law or the *torah*. The author, however, did not give us the text he has in mind. If I may speculate, based on the parallel tradition in 1Tim 2,13, the text of the law this author has in mind is probably the Yahwistic account of the creation in En 2,4b-25. Also the author of Ephesians knew this particular account of creation and even quoted directly from it (Eph 5,31). One sees that the Yahwist sowed a *dangerous* seed of subordination, without probably wishing that it be used the way later traditions did.

Now the pseudo-Pauline writer will go on to make his final remarks about his "teaching" on the subordination of women. How will these women get matters clarified if they were to have a confusion. The answer is in 1Cor 14,35 where the author sealed his doctrine of subordination. The only place where women can open their mouths is in their homes. Only, then, could they ask their questions. Even at this, they are to ask their husbands. But he did not tell us who would help the widows or the unmarried members of his community who have no husbands.

Nevertheless, the author went further to strengthen his extreme subordination by maintaining, for the last time, that it is not good for women to speak in the church. For him, this is *aischron* - an adjective from *aischros* which means disgraceful, ugly, shameful, base.<sup>25</sup> Here we see that this author was very uncompromising. He was in no mood to dilute or water down his statements. For him it is a base, shameful, ugly and disgraceful thing for women to speak in their own church. On account of this, these women were absolutely forbidden to speak in the church and placed to remain perpetually passive and submissive. This is the way the author of 1Cor 14,33a-35 has defined the place of women in his "churches". With this, he has put them in a second class position, an unfortunate position which they still occupy today. They have been banned from speaking in the church and from competing with men in the church. For some people, the God who created men and women in his own image and likeness (En 1,27) forgot to give to women the "charism" to be able to enter into this competition and to become leaders also in this church. In effect, their voices are not



meant to be heard. But will the woman be happy reading 1Cor 14,33b-35? When it is proclaimed as the Word of God, will she willingly and happily respond "Amen"? This leads us to the similar and sorrowful position held by the author of 1Timothy.

### **The Woman Should Not Teach <sup>26</sup> 1Tim 2,11-15**

#### *Preliminary Observations*

Timothy seems to combine several principles of the other texts on the subordination of women. In the first place, it has a formulation similar to that in Ephesians. For instance, in Eph 5.24, the woman is to be submissive to her husband *en panti* - in all things. Likewise, here in 1Timothy, the subordination of the woman is said to be *en pasê hypotagê* - in all submissiveness. Next, both 1Timothy and Titus are united in maintaining that the woman's role is to bear children. For 1Timothy he uses the word *teknogonias* - child-bearing, while Titus used *philoteknous* - lover of children (Tit 2,4). We see that the subordination of women was a feature of the church communities represented by the NT *house code*, even though differences in emphases existed. For instance, between 1Timothy and Titus, there are minor differences, though they belong to the same tradition of the Pastorals. Whereas 1Timothy forbade all teaching activities to women (1Tim 2.12), Titus permitted limited teaching activity (Tit 2.3). Even at this, the aim of this is to teach the young women how to be submissive to their husbands and to be good house keepers. So the teaching function of the women of Titus is to help to grease the tools of their subordination. With these preliminary remarks, let us now examine in details the text of 1Timothy.

The author began on a very strong note (1Tim 2,11), commanding women to learn in silence (*en hêsychia manthanetô*) and in all submissiveness (*en pasê hypotagê*). Here he assigns two roles to women: *learning* and *keeping silence*. These become two important feminine virtues in this community. The author also says how they are to carry these out: They have to do them *en pasê*

*hypotagê* - in all submissiveness. Absolute and unquestionable subordination is demanded of them. These women could be present in the Christian assembly but on the condition that they remain speechless. Based on this mentality, we see that ordinary spectators in a football match are better than them. Such is the way 1Timothy has helped to complicate the problem of the place of women in the church.

Next, 1Tim 2,12 now goes further to re-enforce what has just been said. Further ban was imposed on these women on three points: (a). They were expressly forbidden (*ouk epitrepô*) to teach (*didaskein*). (b). They were forbidden (*ouk epitrepô*) to have authority (*authenthein*) over the man. (c). They were ordered (*all'einai*) to keep quiet (*hêsychia*). These statements can be re-formulated as follows: *I do not permit any woman to teach; I do not permit any woman to have authority over the man; As a result, they have to keep quiet.*

The reader sees that this is a negative programme that has continued to influence church regulations about women. Even in our own time, church policies reflect this programme mapped out by 1Timothy. Is it not possible that such a mentality represented here and elsewhere has influenced the document "Third Instruction On The Correct Implementation Of The Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy", *Liturgiae Instaurationes* of 5th September 1970 when it said that "in accordance with the rules governing this matter, women may proclaim the scripture readings, with the exception of the gospel."<sup>27</sup> Once more there is something considered to be a male prerogative, which 1Timothy fought to preserve. In any case, the reader sees in 1Timothy the beginning of the exclusion of women from the hierarchy and office of the church.

Now 1Tim 2,13 goes on to justify this teaching on women with the use of Scripture. Thus it says - for Adam was formed first, then Eve (*Adam gar prôtos eplasthê, eita Hêva*). As one can see, the author invokes the Yahwistic account of creation (En 2,4a-25) to support his doctrine of the subordination of women. A critical reading of the text in question shows that the Yahwistic narrator,

consciously or unconsciously, planted a dangerous seed of the subordination of women. The narrator preserved two units which deal with the separate creation of man and woman. In these accounts, the man was created first (En 2,7-8) and then the woman (En 2,21-23) but as an afterthought (En 2,18). So man was created before the woman. In which case, God did not create man and woman at the same time, as the priestly account in En 1-2,4a seemed to suggest (cf. En 1,27).

Seen from this standpoint, 1Timothy is quite at home with this tradition. But is it justifiable to use it to support the subordination of women? Is this the main point of the Yahwistic account or was the narrative not a sexual aetiology seeking to explain the sexual relationship between man and woman?<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding, the author of 1Timothy interprets it to mean that the woman should be absolutely subordinated to the man because he (the man) was created first. To the question: Was the man created first in the Yahwistic account and then the woman? The answer is "yes".<sup>29</sup> But to the question: Should the woman, as a consequence, be subordinated to the man? The answer *is* and *must be* an emphatic "no". It will be unfair to use the text of the Yahwist to explain away the subordination of the woman to the man, as if this was an essential part of the *Schöpfungsordnung* - order of creation. The type of radical subordination envisaged and taught by 1Timothy is not to be read into the text of En 2.

Nonetheless, 1Timothy (1Tim 2,14) continues to hide under the shadow of the Yahwist. This time, he goes to the account of the fall of man in En 3. Hence he says - and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and [consequently] became a transgressor<sup>30</sup> (*kai Adam ouk êpatêthê, hê de gynê exapatêtheisa en parabasei gegonen*). Here the author of 1Timothy picks up the account of the fall in En 3 to support his radical programme of the subordination of women. This enables him to insist that Adam was not deceived. As the reader sees in the text of En 3, the woman was the one who was tempted and was also the one to be deceived first (En 3,1-6a). But the story did not end here. It continued with En 3,6b. Here the man was also deceived and so he too ate the

forbidden fruit. So it is not true, as 1Timothy contends, that the man was not deceived (*Adam ouk êpatêthê*) and that *only* the woman was deceived. Here the author of 1Timothy has done a one-sided reading of the text. This enabled him to bend the tradition to say what he wants it to say and consequently to support his radical programme of subordination.

As we have already noted, the evidence in the Yahwistic text shows that both the man and the woman were deceived and that both were also punished (En 3,16-24). In fact, in the trial scene (En 3,8-13), the trial of the man (En 3,8-12) lasted longer than that of the woman (En 3,13) which was summarised only in one verse. Also the man was tried first and his defence shows that he admits a deceit, even though he did not take the responsibility for such a mistake. Hence, he said: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate" (En 3,12). In other words, the man himself has confessed being deceived, even if he pleaded *not guilty*. Even at this, the defence of the woman was not different. In a similar formulation, she also admits deception but like the man could not accept responsibility for it. Hence, she said: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (En 3,13). It is precisely on the condition that both were deceived and were found guilty that the woman and the man were punished, as the rest of the narrative of En 3 tells us. In the light of this, it is unfair for 1Timothy to say that Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and [consequently] became a transgressor. Both the man and the woman were deceived and both became transgressors.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, 1Timothy (1Tim 2,15) offers this soteriological principle to guide the women in his community: Yet she will be saved *through child-bearing*, if she remains in faith and love and holiness with sobriety - *sôthêsetai de dia tês teknogonias, ean meinôsin en pistei kai agapê kai hagiasmô meta sôphrosynês*. Here the author uses the Greek preposition *dia* (through) to propose a soteriological principle for the woman. Her salvation lies *through child-bearing* - *dia tês teknogonias*. Child-bearing becomes an essential element in the life of the Christian woman. Here 1Timothy does not foresee the possibility of the celibate life for

the woman.<sup>32</sup> Based on his principle, how would such women be saved? This question was of no interest to him.

Above all this woman is also required to remain in faith, love and holiness and with sobriety. This becomes the soteriological programme which the author has mapped out for the woman. So child-bearing defines the salvation of the woman. She becomes confined to the *household*. Her holiness and sanctification lies squarely here and not in having any authority over men or in any teaching function in the church. That was the way 1Timothy understood the role of women in Christianity.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The first thing which one sees in the study of women in the in the NT house codes is the contact between gospel and culture. These writers inserted their culture into the NT. This is also true of the constant demand they were making from women to remain completely submissive to men. One is not to forget this cultural element, which unfortunately seems to have set the agenda for determining the place of women in the church today. These authors simply allowed themselves to be heavily influenced by their Jewish past. Sadly and regrettably, today people use their supposedly Christian texts to insist on the unfortunate and sad subordination of women.

Was it not Tertullian who had the courage, (like the deutero-Pauline epistles before him) to say that "a woman may not speak, nor baptise, or 'offer' [the Eucharist], nor claim the right to any *masculine function*, still less to the priestly office."<sup>33</sup> What an unfortunate statement. This is still the programme of action in force today. Did the "Third Instruction On The Correct Implementation Of The Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy", *Liturgiae Instaurationes* of 5th September 1970 not declare as follows: "The traditional liturgical norms of the church prohibit women (young girls, married women, religious) from serving the priest at the altar, even in women chapels, houses, convents, schools and institutes."<sup>34</sup> Luckily, the German and other European

churches have overcome this difficulty by enrolling active female mass servers and even women who play diaconal function by distributing holy communion during and outside the Eucharistic celebration. This is one step forward and a step in the right direction.

But what crime have these women committed? Their only crime is that God created them to be females. And the reason here is biological and not theological. I do not think that if Jesus were to be here today that he would simply prescribe and adopt the line recommended either by 1 Timothy or Tertullian. With this type of mentality, the equality of man and woman becomes something which is absent in church dictionaries and documents. There should be equality of man and woman in the secular society but not in the church. This is an unfortunate situation from which Paul distanced himself and sought to rectify. Hence, the slogan *no male, no female* in Gal 3,28. The liberty which Christ brought is for all, irrespective of biological gender, race, culture or geographical origin. Jesus proclaimed a radical liberty, which Paul and some of the NT communities pushed forward and radically proclaimed. In an atmosphere of this nature, the women in the time of Paul were obviously greatly in need of another redeemer, since they were being reduced to second class creatures. Paul, then, intervened and sought to be another "Moses" for these women and so presented a radical "gospel" and a proclamation which tried to redeem and free them from their "prison yard". Therefore, the fate of the woman today is not the making of Paul.

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<sup>1</sup> L.M. Maloney, "The Pastoral Epistles", in: E. Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, Vol. 2, New York 1994, 364.

<sup>2</sup> This term "deutero-Pauline" is preferred in this work to the term "non Pauline" referring to the same body of writings. This is maintained because these letters still have affinity and relationship with the generally accepted authentic letters from Paul himself. They are products of the Pauline school, even if Paul himself did not write them. They reflect his strand of Christianity. Letters generally considered to belong to this group of deutero-Pauline literature are six in number. They are: *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *2 Thessalonians*, *1 Timothy*, *2*

*Timothy and Titus*. The latter three (1&2 Timothy and Titus) are usually called "the Pastoral epistles".

<sup>3</sup> This code is found in: Col 3,18-4,1; Eph 5,21-6,9; 1Tim 2,8-15: 5,1-2: 6,1-2; Tit 2,1-10: 3,1; 1 Pet 2,18-25: 3,1-7. As the reader will soon see, the subordination texts of the deutero-Pauline letters are found in the context of the *house code* which is not found in Paul himself. Here the woman is confined to the house and in strict submission to the husband.

<sup>4</sup> This idea of confining the woman to the household and determining the extent of her goodness by judging her conformity to the household code points to the evidence in Pro 31,10-31. As the reader may recall, the good woman of Prov 31,10-31 was praised and recognised as being good because she is almost a perfect housemaid, always at the service of the man and the household. Similarly, Philo gives information which tell us that the good woman was to be confined to the house, going to the Temple only when the market is empty. Once more, in the NT house codes, these basic "ideals" of the household are repeated. The only difference is that the writers tried to give them a Christian face.

<sup>5</sup> E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York 1983, 33.

<sup>6</sup> L.M. Maloney, "The Pastoral Epistles", in: E. Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, Vol. 2, New York 1994, 361.

<sup>7</sup> Oepke, "gynê", TDNT I, 782.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart 1971, 565.

<sup>9</sup> For some information, see; B. Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, New York, 1988, 90-104 (This is on 1 Cor 14,33b-36); W. O. Walker, "The Burden of Proof in Identifying Interpolations in the Pauline Letters", *NTS* 33, 1987, 610-618; B. Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, 59-65.

<sup>10</sup> I recognise that 1Cor 11,2-16 has its own problems. But this is not the place to do its exegesis since it is outside the scope of this present work.

<sup>11</sup> For views maintaining this pseudo-Pauline authorship, see also: B. Byrne, *Paul and the Christian woman*, 62-65.

<sup>12</sup> How far has this picture changed today? Has not the ecclesiology of 1Tim 2 and beyond influenced the practice in some Christian communities? Does the Christian assembly today not still gag and stifle these women, making them only interested listeners? How often are they heard? Are they ever there when very important church decisions are to be made? What is their ranking on the hierarchical scale? Even when they are also celibates like their male counterparts, does it make any difference? That this subordinationist ecclesiology is so cherished even today as coming from God is sad and regrettable. The women in the community of 1Timothy have no authority to teach: in our own community today, do they teach? Yet it was Paul who gave this maxim: *no male, no female*

and we pretend as if this is not also part of the Holy scripture. Is this not the game of pick and choose?

<sup>13</sup> For more on the place of women as envisaged by 1Tim, see; Lewis, R. M. "The 'Women' of 1 Timothy 3.11", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 542 1(979) 167-175.

<sup>14</sup> Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 749.

<sup>15</sup> Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 303.

<sup>16</sup> Even today, she has to sit aside in silence and await council decisions and synodal declarations. All she needs to do is to wait for the men to conclude either the Council or the Synod so that she can nod her head and say "yes" in perfect obedience. If this is not the case, she is not a "good Christian woman", that is in the Christianity of our own making.

<sup>17</sup> Interesting for Pauline study is the fact that Paul did not use it in his texts dealing with women.

<sup>18</sup> Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 847.

<sup>19</sup> Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 848.

<sup>20</sup> Delling "hypotassô", TDNT VIII, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Delling "hypotassô", TDNT VIII, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Delling "hypotassô", TDNT VIII, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Delling "hypotassô", TDNT VIII, 44.

<sup>24</sup> These are the first five books of the OT beginning with Genesis.

<sup>25</sup> Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> See text above.

<sup>27</sup> Liturgiae Instaurationes 7, in: A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar And Post Conciliar Documents*, Minnesota 1975, 217.

<sup>28</sup> See; G. von Rad, *Genesis OTL*, London 1972, 84-85.

<sup>29</sup> This is maintained because the Priestly account in Gen. 1-2,4a did make this distinction in its creation narrative. All that it told us is that God created man. The relevant text there is: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1,27). Here, the narrator simply tells us that God created both man and woman without indicating whether there is any hierarchical order of their creation or not.

<sup>30</sup> The author of Sir 25,24 seems to know this very tradition.

<sup>31</sup> I am aware of the fact that one could argue that possibly another version of the tradition in question was available to 1Timothy. This is hypothetically possible. But exegesis is neither a matter of hypothesis nor a matter of "perhaps". It is a question of considering the available *extant* evidence. So we can only judge and evaluate 1Timothy on the basis of the evidence before us. It is not good to invent "half-truths" just to help one to support his point of view or in order to help the argument to be won. In matters of theological formulations, one has to be very objective, even if the available evidence is against the view which one wants to support.



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<sup>32</sup>. Once more, we see that celibacy was not a feature of the Christianity known to this author. He could not even anticipate this. He goes for a natural option which foresees only a woman with child in his church community.

<sup>33</sup>. Tertullian, "De Virginibus Velandis 9", in: H. Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers*, p. 151.

<sup>34</sup>. Liturgiae Instaurationes 7, in: A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar And Post Conciliar Documents*, Minnesota 1975, 217.

## BOOK REVIEW

Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, c.s.sp *Richard A. McCormick and the Renewal of Moral Theology*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995 Pp. xvi, 254.

The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* contains the following remarkable passage:

The Church safeguards the deposit of God's Word, from which religious and moral principles are drawn. But it does not always have a ready answer to individual questions, and it wishes to combine the light of revelation with the experience of everyone in order to illuminate the road on which humanity has recently set out (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 33).

Elsewhere, the Council called specifically for the improvement of moral theology (*Optatam Totius*, No. 16), with emphasis on the calling of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to produce fruit in love for the life of the world.

Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, c.s.sp. has given us a masterly account of one of the major contributors to this programme of renewal in his book, *Richard A. McCormick and the Renewal of Moral Theology*. This work is more than a straightforward account of McCormick's thought; it is a creative interpretation. The author highlights McCormick's major achievements. In a respectful, critical way, he draws attention to some perceived inadequacies in method and content. He also points to limitations in McCormick's world-view, which affect the value of his overall contribution. Odozor's final chapter offers suggestive clues about how moral theology might proceed in the future, in a more global setting and with more awareness of the variety of human cultures.

The Vatican Council wished to relativize the certainties of the manual tradition; to encourage respect for the authority of human experience; a greater awareness of the complexities and struggles of individual lives, a person-centred morality. The Council called for a greater tentativeness in moral judgements and a genuine dialogue between theology, the human sciences and the wider society.

All of these features of the renewal of moral theology are enshrined in the writings of Richard McCormick. However, McCormick was and is not a system-builder, but as he endearingly said of himself, a "fire-fighter". Odozor sets out to systematise his thought and to discover the vital clues to his overall achievement. This he does in seven chapters which deal with the central themes in McCormick's moral theology.

The first chapter contains a biographical sketch and a very interesting account of the manualist tradition in Catholic moral theology, in which McCormick was trained. This is followed by chapters on the nature of Christian ethics, the Church as moral teacher, Anthropology, proportionate reason, casuistry, and a final evaluation of McCormick's contribution to the renewal of moral theology. From

the beginning, the reader is made to feel confident in Odozor's grasp of a large body of source materials and his careful reading of texts.

### *Proportionate Reason*

One of the most rewarding features of this book is the rigorous account of proportionate reason in chapter 5. This is pursued right from its beginnings in McCormick's doctoral dissertation, his questioning of the traditional distinction between direct and indirect voluntareity, the considerable influences of the Vatican Council and the later publication of *Humanae Vitae*. He was determined to move away from a style of thinking which placed disproportionate weight on the analysis of the external, physical act. His rejection of the concept of intrinsic evil as applied to contraception in the encyclical, is a vital clue to the hard core of McCormick's moral theology: the human person integrally and adequately considered is the basis for all moral evaluation. How does a particular act relate to the order of persons, to the hierarchy of values?

The intellectual upheaval caused by the birth control debate led McCormick to give increasing weight to teleological thinking. Odozor argues persuasively that proportionate reasoning is not a matter of simple, utilitarian calculus. For Richard McCormick, proportionate reasoning is part of the exercise of the virtue of prudence to protect the basic human goods as much as possible in a complex and often tragic moral environment. The issue is: what action is most likely to promote the good of the human person integrally and adequately considered? Central to all of this is a conflict in the *ordo bonorum* or hierarchy of values. The moral struggle is to respond to the demands of love in particular circumstances, and not simply seek what is licit.

McCormick insists that proportionate reason in a conflict situation is not a capricious factor imported into an act already defined; it constitutes its very object:

In other words, proportionate reason enters into the very definition of *what* one is doing. If one conceives proportionate reason as *in addition to an act already definable by its object*, then one does indeed get into some mischievous results..... (p.108).

In the light of official generalised condemnations of proportionalism in moral theology, the reader is encouraged to follow the argument step by step throughout chapter 5, and make up his or her own mind.

I have large reservations about the applicability of proportionate reasoning to political-moral decision making. I do not see how it can escape the charge of utilitarian calculus, finally determined by crude political necessity or *raisons d'état*. Odozor addresses this issue in a highly significant passage, with direct references to McCormick:

.....Also justifying obliteration bombing, as Harry Truman did in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, in the understanding that it might end the war and thus save more lives in the long run, is to do serious injury to an associated good, liberty, because "making innocent (non-combatant) persons the object of our targeting is a form of extortion in international affairs that contains an implicit denial of human freedom." The bombing has no necessary connection to the good being sought. (p.115.)

The chain of proportionalist moral reasoning displayed here is chilling in its implications for moral decision making. The focus of moral attention is distracted from the immediate victims of the obliteration, the hundreds of thousands of innocent persons who were burnt live and died hideous deaths or were maimed for life, to the serious injury that will be done to the value of liberty, a necessary value in international life. The essential wrong-doing is to the human good, liberty (as distinct from the good of saving more lives), because obliteration-bombing is a form of extortion in international affairs, which threatens the good of human freedom.

If we apply proportionate reasoning consistently to this case, and for example, to the saturation-bombing of German cities in order to break civilian morale and so win the war more quickly (following a decision of the British war cabinet in 1940), then we have no coherent moral ground on which to identify and reject the intrinsic wickedness of the mass-slaughter of innocent non-combatants in war. As for the final sentence - "The bombing has no necessary connection to the good being sought" - this fragile conclusion will be briskly refuted by the politicians and military planners.

### *The Nature of Christian Ethics*

Of special interest in this book is chapter 2 on the nature of Christian ethics. I would like to raise some questions provoked by this chapter, and by the final section summing up Richard McCormick's achievement. I may be permitted to conclude with some personal reflections stimulated by Odozor's work.

It is not possible in a review to do justice to the nuances of one of the liveliest debates in moral theology since Vatican II. However, McCormick's position on the nature of Christian ethics can be briefly stated. Christian faith does not add to the material content of morality, a fundamental mode of human experience, which can be discovered by human reason. Reason informed by faith is the key to his thinking. Christian faith has an influence in the shaping of the moral agent and the formation of the moral judgement. Faith affects human dispositions, intentions and goals. "It can transform our view of persons and their meaning as well as our style of performing the moral tasks common to all persons" (p.34). Odozor stresses, however, that for McCormick, insight from faith brings "confirmatory" rather than "originating" warrants to moral reflection:

The warrants of faith are confirmatory because they provide the Christian with a privileged articulation or objectification in Christ of what everyone does or can experience. (p.34).

McCormick insists that the warrants of faith are not originating because they do not and cannot add to human self-understanding any material content which is strange or foreign to man as he experiences himself in the world. It is just at this point that moral theology needs to be sharpened and rendered methodologically self-critical, by taking account of J.B. Metz's critique of the bourgeois, private individual, child of the Enlightenment:

He is the subject in the subject. He is concealed behind the rational autonomous man who has come of age in the modern era. He is finally also the creator of that form of religion which is used, as it were, to decorate and set the scene, freely and in private, for middle-class festivals and which has for a long time been current even in normal christianity. Theology, which believes that it is bound to defend the contemporary human subject uncritically as a religious subject, is, in this perspective, simply a late reflection of this middle-class religion. (Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, p.33.)

What the individual, possibly a large wage-earner in a multi-national arms company, "does or can experience", is crucially influenced by the liberal capitalist society in which he has discovered his ethical self. Elsewhere, Odozor makes some telling points about the limits of McCormick's North American and European outlook.

What "everyone does or can experience" is socially and politically determined. There is much more at stake here than the limits of human finiteness. Over the past twenty years or so, the Church's articulation of the preferential options for the poor (taken up at various levels in the official Magisterium), necessarily implies a radically new way of experiencing oneself in the world. The option for the poor is grounded in the fundamental salvific truth that the God revealed in the Judaeo-Christian tradition identifies himself with the weak, the oppressed, and the crucified. In a violent, unjust world, the full reception of this truth may lead to new material content in human ethical self-understanding. This will be strange and foreign to the experience of most citizens in the Northern hemisphere. The question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics must be brought beyond issues of style and the manner of accomplishing the moral tasks common to everyone.

In concluding his chapter on Christian ethics, Odozor makes a very important point about the goal of moral striving. The manuals always related morality to the beatific vision, thus giving morality a clear focus. "In McCormick's understanding of moral theology, there is no room for such consciousness" (p.45). There is not much evidence of eschatological awareness, Odozor remarks. This is a significant lack in any Christian moral theology. It may be due to his concentration on the

individual moral agent and how he comes to discern right and wrong in a complex world. Moral theology, however, cannot rest with individual lives. It has to move from biography to history; the story of whole societies; moral struggle in a world of dependency and famine, bedevilled by the lethal profits from the arms trade. Moral theology on this wider stage would necessarily lead to a more satisfying account of moral striving.

In his final chapter, Odozor pays tribute to the great achievements of his subject. In particular, he records his part in the movement from an act-centred, sin-obsessed morality, to a morality built around the human person integrally and adequately considered. There is too, McCormick's large achievement in helping to place theology at the service of the entire faith community and the whole of humanity, in the quest for the common good.

Odozor is courteous but firm in listing the deficiencies in McCormick's theology as he sees them. "Closeness to the tradition ensures that one's theological agenda is dictated by developments within it" (p.172). This has its advantages but it has also given rise to some of the serious deficiencies in his work. He has given little attention to virtue ethics or the formation of the character of the agent; he has little awareness of variations of cultures within the Church. More seriously, he has hardly shown awareness of racism and the oppression of minorities (pp. 172-173). Odozor's verdict is that McCormick is too closely tied to the tradition and its concerns.

Recently, McCormick called for what he terms "a universalist moral theology" Odozor traces this search to his belief "that there is a core at which point human divisions into cultural, racial, or personal groupings disappear. It is thus the work of moral theology to speak to this core or to draw from it in order to appeal to the human" (p.173).

With all respect, I think that this rational quest for a politically neutral, common core of humanness is doomed to failure. It leads right back to the moral rationalism and universalism of the manuals, untouched by critical, historical consciousness. What seems to be missing is a critical hermeneutical perspective.

### *The Option for the Poor*

John O'Brien, c.s.sp. in his *Theology and the option for the poor*,<sup>1</sup> has argued convincingly that a theology from the perspective of the option for the poor is constitutive of Christian theology. It occupies what he terms a relatively normative and privileged hermeneutical standpoint.

The massive catastrophic suffering of whole peoples in poverty and marginalization is more than a theological theme. Since salvation in Christ is historically mediated through the achievement of a new quality of human solidarity of which the poor are the privileged architects, involvement in the struggle of the poor is a condition of the lived faith, which seeks self-understanding in theology. (O'Brien, p.162)

The pope declared in an address to cardinals in Rome in 1985: "I have made and I do make this option. I identify myself with it. I feel it could not be otherwise, since it is the eternal message of the Gospel." The option is made for the exploited, those whose basic rights are violated, those whom society dismisses as "non-persons". One may speak here of a new stage in the self-understanding of the Christian tradition.

The evangelical urgency of the preferential option confronts us through the pope's words, through theological writings from the perspective of the poor, and through the lives of many humble Christians who have made the option themselves.

What is urgently needed is a systematic discussion of the essential meaning and precise ethical and political requirements of the option for the poor. The moral subject of the option includes the individual Christian, a local community, a religious congregation or the universal Church.<sup>2</sup>

Fr. Odozor has rightly acclaimed Richard McCormick's contribution to the paradigm shift in Catholic moral theology after Vatican II. As we approach the end of the century, the renewal of moral theology must assume a very different character. There is a need for precise moral reflection on the practical demands of a radical commitment to work with the poor for the sake of their liberation. One can only allude here to the nature of the task ahead:

Rather than simply extend charity universally, in an outward radiating series of concentric circles, the *preferential* option reverses the usual order of priorities whereby the nearest are given priority and needs of the most distant are secondary. Special devotion and priority is given to those to whom we are least bound by ties of affection, blood, class etc. This preference is rooted in God's own concern for the "least".<sup>3</sup>

On the evidence of the book under review, Paulinus Odozor is well-placed to make his own contribution to the continuing renewal of moral theology.

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<sup>1</sup> John O'Brien, *Theology and the Option for the Poor*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted here to Stephen J. Pope, "The 'Preferential Option for the Poor' An Ethic for 'Saints and Heroes'?" *Irish Theological Quarterly*, No.3, 1993, pp.161-176.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Pope, loc.cit., p.163

## PREVIOUS EDITIONS

Vol. 2 No. 1 April 1989      ISSN 0794-8670

### Church And Politics In Nigeria

<b>Foreword</b>	The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians (EANT).....	4
<b>Dr. C.U. Manus</b>	New Testament Theological Foundations for Christian Contribution to Politics in Nigeria.....	7
<b>Fr. E.E. Uzukwu</b>	Church-State Relations in the Early Church and the Crisis facing the Christian Church in Nigeria.....	31
<b>Dr. C.I. Ejizu</b>	Ethics of Politics in Nigeria: the Christian perspective.....	46
<b>Rev. Canon S.I. Omoera</b>	A Theology of Nigerian Politics.....	59
<b>Bishop J. Onaiyekan</b>	State Secularity and the Nigerian Christian.....	75
<b>Dr. A.O. Erhueh</b>	The Contribution of Christianity to Politics in Nigeria: A. Historico-Theological overview.....	84

Vol 2 No. 2 - Vol. 3 No. 1 Nov. '89 - Apr. '90      ISSN 0794-8670

### The Power Game: 'Kaduna Mafia' And The Church In Nigeria

<b>Editorial:</b>	.....	4
<b>Dr. Bala J. Takaya</b>	The Kaduna Mafia and the Church in Nigeria.. ..	6
<b>Bishop J. Onaiyekan</b>	Strategies for Islamic Expansion in Nigeria - A Christian Response: Notes and Reflections.....	16
<b>Dr. Bala J. Takaya</b>	The foundations of Religious Intolerance in Nigeria: Backgrounds for understanding the Maitatsine phenomenon.....	31
<b>Ibrahim Musa Ahmadu</b>	Peace and Stability in Nigeria. The Role of the Church.....	44
<b>Rev. Dr. Obiora Ike</b>	Church and Contemporary Nigerian Society (Social Teachings of the Church:	



	Past and Present - Enunciation of Relevant Theological Principles).....	61
<b>Rev. Dr. Anthony O. Erhueh</b>	The Dignity of the Human Person in Contemporary Nigerian Society.....	72
<b>Rev. Dr. Simon O. Anyanwu</b>	Response to the Book: "The Kaduna Mafia" from the View-point of Political Theology.....	83
<b>Rev. Dr. Breifne Walker c.s.sp</b>	Bonhoeffer and Christian Social Ethics : - Private Virtue or Responsible Action?.....	92

## Vol. 4, 1-2, 1991

ISSN 0794-8670

**Human Rights - The African Perspective**

<b>Foreword</b>	Human Rights - The African Perspective.....	3
<b>O.C. Eze</b>	Nigeria and Human Rights - Prospects and Problems.....	5
<b>L. Hurbon</b>	The Slave Trade and Black Slavery in America.....	19
<b>C.I. Ejizu</b>	Human Rights in African Indigenous Religion.....	31
<b>I.M. Ahmadu</b>	The Rights of Christians in Islamic States of Nigeria.....	46
<b>B. Muoneke</b>	Women Discipleship and Evangelization (Luke 8:1-3).....	59
<b>O.U. Kalu</b>	The Protestants' Protest for Human Rights.....	70
<b>M.Nkinda</b>	The Particular Juridical Order of African Churches: Application of the Principle of Subsidiarity and Decentralization.....	89
<b>E.E. Uzukwu</b>	Human Right in Africa - Contextual Theological Reflection.....	99
<b>I.R.A. Ozigboh</b>	The Definitive Rehabilitation of Bishop Shanahan: A Review Article.....	121
<b>Book Review</b>	a. N.I. Omenka: <i>The school in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886-1950. Leiden: Brill, 1989, 317 pages.</i> Reviewer: Peter Ik. Okonkwo, CMF.....	140
	b. J.I. Ibegbu: <i>Nationalisation of Schools in Nigeria, Rome: N. Domenici - Peuceux, 1991. 124 pages.</i> Reviewer: Francis Njoku, CMF.....	143

c. D. Regan: *Church for Liberation - A pastoral portrait of the Church in Brazil*. Dublin: (Dominican Publications): 1987, 238 pages.

Reviewer: Jojo Obu-Mends, C.S.Sp.....146

d. B. Frost: *The politics of Peace*. London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991, 225 pages £10.95.

Reviewer: Breifne Walker, C.S.Sp.....149

e. P. Vallely: *Bad Samaritans: First World Ethics and Third World Debt*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990, ix + 374 pages.

Reviewer: E.E. Uzukwu, C.S.Sp.....152

**Vol. 5/1 : 1993**

**ISSN 0794-8670**

**Structural Adjustment Programmes: An African Christian Response**

	Editorial.....	1
<b>J.M. Walioggo</b>	The Role of Culture and Religion in Authentic Development of Africa.....	3
<b>U. Simson</b>	Should We Develop? And In What Direction?.....	23
<b>Obiora Ike</b>	Development in Africa: Cultural, Ethical Religious Considerations.....	32
<b>J. Mihevc</b>	The Theology of Structural Adjustment.....	44
<b>B. Ikegwuonu</b>	Self-Reliance of Spiritan Young Provinces and Foundations in Developing Countries.....	61
<b>M.H. Kukah</b>	The Price of Faith: Money in the Economy of Salvation.....	72
<b>Book Review</b>		
	1. Africa T. Hennelly, ed., <i>Liberation Theology</i> . A. Documentary History. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990, xxvi + 547 pages. Reviewer: Editor.....	83
	2. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. <i>African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation</i> . A Popular Version. Addis Ababa: UNECA, 1991. Reviewer: Editor.....	84

**Democratization Process In Africa (Multiethnicity And African Nation-States)**

	Editorial.....	1
<b>Nicoué K.</b>	Broohm Political Power, Multiethnic Territories and Democratic Renewal in Africa.....	6
<b>B. Abanuka</b>	African Traditional Communities and Multiethnic States.....	16
<b>J. Okoro Ijoma</b>	Nigeria's Path to Western Democracy 1900-1960: A Historical Perspective.....	30
<b>C.U. Ilegbune</b>	The Legitimation of Government in Africa.....	46

**Reviews and Review Articles**

## 1. For Sovereign National Conferences in Post-Colonial Africa.

A Review Article of F. Eboussi Boulaga's *Les Conférences Nationales en Afrique noire. Une Affaire à Suivre*. Paris: Karthala, 1993.

Reviewer: Elochukwu E. Uzukwu . . . . . 64

## 2. Olusegun Obasanjo and Akin Mobogunje (Editors),

*Elements of Democracy*. Abeokuta, Nigeria: ALF Publications, 1992, xi + 212 pages.

Reviewer: Iwuchukwu Oliver . . . . . 71

	Editorial.....	1
<b>Elochukwu Uzukwu</b>	A Servant Church in a New African Nation: Leadership as a Service of Listening.....	4
<b>Cora Twohig-Moengangongo</b>	Paradigms of Power.....	33
<b>Meinrad P. Hebga</b>	Universality in Theology and Inculturation.....	52
<b>Emefie I. Metuh</b>	Two Decades of Religious Conflict in Nigeria: A Recipe for Peace.....	69
	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria: Communique.....	94

**Vol 6 No 1 : 1994****ISSN 0794-8670**

	Editorial.....	1
<b>Elochukwu Uzukwu</b>	A Servant Church in a New African Nation: Leadership as a Service of Listening.....	4
<b>Cora Twohig-Moengangongo</b>	Paradigms of Power.....	33
<b>Meinrad P. Hebga</b>	Universality in Theology and Inculturation.....	52
<b>Emefie I. Metuh</b>	Two Decades of Religious Conflict in Nigeria: A Recipe for Peace.....	69
	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria: Communique.....	94

**Vol 6 No 2 : 1994****ISSN 0794-8670****The African Synod - Initial Results and Reflections**

	Editorial.....	1
<b>John Onaiyekan</b>	What We Saw and Heard At the African Synod.....	3
<b>Tharcisse Tshibangu</b>	The Special Synod For Africa and the Tasks of African Theology.....	15
<b>Chukwuma J. Okoye</b>	The Synod Challenges the Church in Africa.....	25
<b>Amuluche Gregory Nnamani</b>	The African Synod and the Model of Church-as-Family.....	41
<b>Paulinus I. Odozor</b>	Thoughts on an African Christian Theology of Marriage.....	56

**Vol 7 No. 1-2: 1995 ISSN 0794 - 8670****Violence and State Security**

	Editorial.....	1
<b>Ebuley Afful</b>	Violence and State Security in Africa: A Sociological Analysis.....	5

<b>Francis Duniya</b>	The Zangon Kataf Crisis in Respect of Minority Culture in Northern Nigeria.....27
<b>I.W. Orakwe</b>	The Prison and You: A Study in Diminishing Social Responsibility in Nigeria.....51
	Catholic Prison Chaplains' Communique.....64
<b>Matthew Hassan Kukah</b>	Political Stability and the Leadership and the Inevitability of Instability.....69
<b>Cecilia Ukamaka Asogwa</b>	Managing Stress Among Rural Poor in a Distressed Economy: DEC's Experience.....88
<b>George Ehusani</b>	Theology at the Service of the People.....98
<b>Book Review</b>	Chukwuma Innocent: <i>Above the Law, A Report on Torture and Extra-judicial Killings by the Police in Lagos State, Nigeria</i> . Lagos: Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), 1994. vi + 197 pages. Reviewer: Elochukwu Uzukwu, c.s.sp.

**Vol 6 No 1 : 1994      ISSN 0794-8670**  
**Power, Authority and Leadership: African and Christian**

	Editorial . . . . .	1
<b>Elochukwu Uzukwu</b>	A Servant Church in a New African Nation: Leadership as a Service of Listening . . . . .	4
<b>Cora Twohig-Moengangongo</b>	Paradigms of Power . . . . .	33
<b>Meinrad P. Hebga</b>	Universality in Theology and Inculturation . . . . .	52
<b>Emefie I. Metuh</b>	Two Decades of Religious Conflict in Nigeria: A Recipe for Peace . . . . .	69
	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria: Communique . . . . .	94

**Vol 6 No 2 : 1994      ISSN 0794-8670**  
**The African Synod - Initial Results and Reflections**

	Editorial . . . . .	1
<b>John Onaiyekan</b>	What We Saw and Heard At the African Synod . . . . .	3
<b>Tharcisse Tshibangu</b>	The Special Synod For Africa and the Tasks of African Theology . . . . .	15
<b>Chukwuma J. Okoye</b>	The Synod Challenges the Church in Africa . . . . .	25
<b>Amuluche Gregory Nnamani</b>	The African Synod and the Model of Church-as-Family . . . . .	41
<b>Paulinus I. Odozor</b>	Thoughts on an African Christian Theology of Marriage . . . . .	56



**Grassroots Women Arise**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial	1
S. A. Akpala    Human Rights Education, Customary Laws and the Position of Women in the Contemporary Nigerian Society	4
M. A. Olagoke        Rural Poverty and Women's Response to Economic Policies in Africa	15
Protus Kemdirim & Nubia Kai        The Role of Muslim Women in Moorish Empire Implications for Women in Islam Today	23
Olajubi Oyeronke        Christ, Women and Culture: Model for the Nigerian Society	33
Chinedu A. Amadi-Azuogu    The Place of Women in The NT House Codes	39

*BOOK REVIEW*

Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, c.s.sp <i>Richard A. McCormick and the Renewal of Moral Theology.</i> Reviewer, Breifne Walker, c.s.sp.	60
---	----